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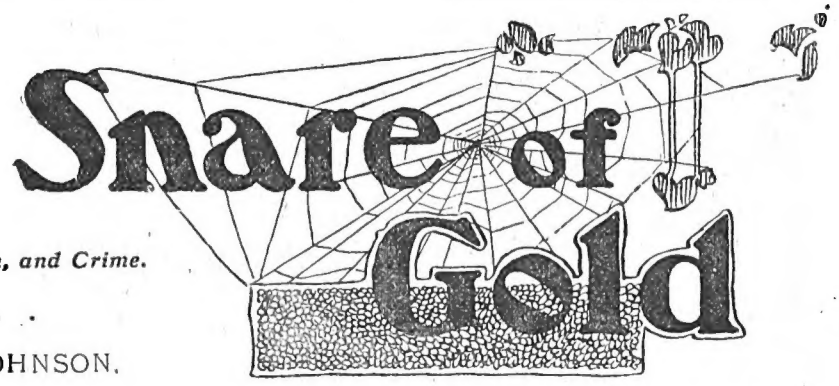
SHORT STORIES

No. 764.] Week Ending August 22nd, 1903. [One Penny.

NEW SERIAL STORY. **START TO-DAY.**

The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

By

Henry T. Johnson.

BEGIN READING HERE.

George Geldart, the rich City merchant, awakens to find that he is lying in a coffin, wrapped in grave clothes. Fearful lest he may lose consciousness again before he properly realises his surroundings, he clambers out of the sexagon.

There are voices!—those of a man and woman. Moving by instinct, he flings aside a wardrobe door and hides within. It is his son Eric, and his adopted daughter Clare talking. From their conversation he learns that his younger son, Ronald, has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

A tap at the door! Geldart hears the frou-frou of the girl's skirt as she goes from the room, and presently he hears another voice, the voice of Boanerges Blagdon, his business partner, whom he has so often befriended.

It then transpires that Eric Geldart and Blagdon have conspired to end the life of the former's father. Eric demands a price from Blagdon for recovering some of the latter's promissory notes from his father's possession—old Geldart had noticed their disappearance, and thought that he had been robbed of them by Ronald. Blagdon promises that Eric shall have his price, then they leave the room.

Geldart slips swiftly out of the wardrobe, and, taking with him various articles, deposits them in the coffin, putting the lid back in its place. Then the undertaker's men come in and screw it down.

No sooner is this done than Ronald enters the room, and his father hears him bemoaning the fact that the body is out of sight, and his heart goes out to the son he has so cruelly wronged.

Click! Once again the door is closed. Ronald is gone!

And then George Geldart leaves his hiding-place again, dons a suit and hat of tweeds, an overcoat, and a pair of boots; then, watching his opportunity, he slips downstairs and out of the great house which can never more be his home.

George Geldart is penniless! He determines to go to Ronald, but on reaching the hotel where his son was staying, he is informed that the boy has gone no one knows where. He strolls out into the streets and there sees, what is supposed to be his own funeral, pass, attended with much pomp and show. Then he feels his unutterable loneliness, and is wondering in what direction to turn his steps, when he is greeted in a hearty manner by a man called Stanyer, whom Geldart had known in his youth.

In his will George Geldart disinherits Ronald, and leaves practically everything to Eric, who, with the help of Lord Lynton, puts up for Parliament as Pro-Con. (Progressive-Conservative) candidate for Little Claverton, and is duly elected. He falls in love with Madeleine Lorraine, Lord Lynton's daughter, though he is pledged to marry Clare Armitage, his adopted sister.

After the reading of the will Ronald leaves the house and wanders aimlessly along the streets, feeling very bitter with everyone.

The sound of galloping horses reaches his ears—they are runaways dragging a brougham after them. As they near him, Ronald, quick as thought, tears off his overcoat and flings it full at the heads of the maddened steeds. They swerve and Ronald seizes the bridle of one of them, only to be trampled underfoot; but the momentary check has given others an opportunity of coming to his assistance, and the horses are stopped.

Ronald is borne to a doctor's, and there learns that he has saved the life of Madeleine Lorraine, who was in the carriage.

Stanyer has made a fortune in business in Australia, and wants someone to look after things in England for him. He offers the position to Geldart, and the latter, telling him nothing of what has transpired, agrees to act for him, and sets up an office in Crosby Square.

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THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT.

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Sampson Scrimshaw, Company Promoter.

The premises Geldart occupied consisted of one barely-furnished room on the second floor of 14a Crosby Square, with the Taga-Taga Wool and Hide Agency unassumingly lettered on the unassuming door.

The floor beneath was occupied, indeed monopolised by, the offices of the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange Limited, whose title was displayed as frequently as possible on many glass doors and several brass-plates upon the landing and the staircase, with an extra special announcement on an extra imposing plate on each of the lintels of the portals of the house.

To several of such announcements there was appended in italics within brackets the name, Mr. Sampson Scrimshaw, Managing Director.

The office of the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange, Ltd., was as abundant of bustle as the one on the floor above it was destitute. Between its plate-glass swing doors footsteps were hurrying to and fro from ten till five, and the air within its partitions resounded and vibrated with the thrill of electric bells, telephonic conversations, the click-click of tape machines, and the "clackitty-clack" of typewriters.

And every morning punctually at 10.30 Mr. Sampson Scrimshaw, descending from his smart dog-cart, handed the reins to his immaculate tiger, and bustling through the central gorgeous plate-glass swing-door, infused galvanic influence into the whole.

For Mr. Sampson Scrimshaw, as a matter of fact, was the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange, Ltd., what Mr. Scrimshaw was not was a more difficult matter to decide.

Some twelve years previously he had made his *debut* in the City as a very short youth, perched on a very high stool, in a stockbroker's office.

At an age when most boys in the intervals of football and marbles were making their heads ache working out the complications of imaginary accounts in respect of imaginary goods between imaginary customers, little Sampson was figuring out real transactions between real people, and acquiring real knowledge and experience, with the trifling difference that whereas the mental fagging of the other boys was entailing considerable expense upon their parents, little Sampson's acquisition of knowledge, instead of entailing expense, paid his expenses.

Mid-day in his teens he commenced to speculate in a small way on his own account, displaying even in those petty transactions, which were his beginnings, the shrewdness and foresight which later in life distinguished larger ones.

Even in those days many of those around him, with the gambling taint in their blood, noting the success of his ventures more than the qualities insuring their successes, looked upon him as a mascotte, so that when the word went round the office that little Sampson was doing a flutter in this stock or that, his colleagues, his superiors, even his employers, on the ground that he was such a lucky little chap, went for his particular fancy stock with the result of sometimes hedging a bad speculation, and at others even bringing off a coup.

They called it Sampson's luck, but Sampson never gambled; he formed his opinions carefully, then went for them strenuously, winning his way by what many called happy chance, but which he knew to be sound judgment.

By-and-bye his operations expanded. Before he was out of his teens he was lending money at interest, finding capital for big concerns, earning thereby snug commissions, forming syndicates that bought patents, stock, plant, and good wills for songs and sold them to trustees for companies about to form for fortunes.

A firm believer in the power of the press, at twenty-one he was the proprietor of a newspaper devoted to finance and the drama, and particularly the booming of his investments and ventures, financial and theatrical, for amongst other things he ran a theatre in London and several touring companies. For although Sampson had little leaning to literature, he recognised its commercial value, though scarcely himself a man of soul he trafficked advantageously with such as were.

To Sampson Scrimshaw the old gentleman on the floor above was a problem. There was a mystery about the man, and Mr. Scrimshaw had an aversion to mysteries.

Had he known the nature of the taciturn, solitary old man's business, the man and his business would have ceased to interest him, but as he could learn nothing about either, he began to wonder a deal, and wondering led to worrying.

What if the man were a spy? Mr. Scrimshaw's own transactions were of so varied and peculiar a character as to render that theory uncomfortably plausible.

So Mr. Scrimshaw endeavoured to gather from Frederick Stanyer's post the nature of Mr. Frederick Stanyer's business, but, unfortunately for the success of this idea, Mr. Stanyer had no post to be inspected.

He then took to wishing Old Mystery good morning, as he toiled up the stairs, and to volunteering remarks upon the weather, courtesies and remarks to which Old Mystery responded as tersely as possible.

There were occasions when Scrimshaw worked late, remaining in his office long after his smart clerks and smarter typewriters had bustled away from it, and there were other occasions when he returned to it, unattended, at strangely unofficial hours, even when midnight reigned over the City, and the asphalted streets gleamed bare and destitute of traffic, vehicular or pedestrian.

At such times letting himself, often in evening dress, in with a pass key and switching on the electric light, he would remain in his own room poring over the contents of his private safe, at others flitting around his offices, peering into this pigeon-hole and that, this or that desk or drawer. For it was Scrimshaw's principle to take nothing for granted.

One night, seated alone poring over the contents of a cash-box crammed with crisp bank notes, cheques, drafts, and coupons of many shapes and colours, he all of a sudden startled—at a sound.

Convulsively, with one hand he crammed a crisp heap back into the box, slid the other hand inside an open drawer beside him, and gripped a glittering deadly toy lying there.

Again he heard the sound, the sound of a footstep, quietly closed the box, clicked the key in its lock, placed it in the open drawer, taking therefrom in exchange a silver-mounted revolver, and threaded his way on tiptoe towards the main door of his offices.

Pat-a-pat—closer came the descending footsteps, and suddenly switching on the electric light, he shoved outwards and stood there on the landing face to face with—Old Mystery. And the two men, the old and the young, facing each other, with every nerve strained to utmost tension, exclaimed, swiftly and simultaneously:

"What are you doing here?"

Old Mystery answered brusquely:

"I'm minding my business."

"But what is your business? To mind other people's? By the Lord Harry, old man, if you're spying on mine you're playing a dangerous game!" And he withdrew from his dress jacket pocket his right hand, clenching the deadly toy.

"Put that thing away," said Old Mystery, for George Geldart was in no hurry to return towards that brink he had just in time returned from, "whatever your business may be, straight or crooked, it is nothing to me."

"You're sure of that? Then what are you doing here in the heart of the city in the heart of the night?"

"What's that to you? Suppose I ask you the same question?"

The other, muttering, returned within his swinging plate-glass door and Old Mystery was about to continue his downstair journey when suddenly he paused, his eye attracted by something which had fallen from Scrimshaw's pocket as he withdrew that revolver.

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Picking it up, he tapped the swing door, but there was no response. He tapped again with a like result, he pushed it and, Scrimshaw in his excitement, having omitted to fasten it, Old Mystery entered, peeped along the corridor at the end of which there gleamed the ground-glass door panel of a lighted room.

With an exclamation of impatience he walked down the corridor. As he did so, Scrimshaw, listening to the advancing footsteps, rose from his chair, muttering, "The old liar! He is spying! I'll watch his little game," and, withdrawing within the shadow of the safe, he waited.

There was a tap-tap at the door and, there being no answer, Old Mystery softly entered. With an annoyed glance around he exclaimed:

"Confound the fellow! he's not here!"

And Scrimshaw, emerging from behind the safe and covering him with his revolver, said, in a hard, deliberate voice:

"You're wrong, my friend, he is here, and before you leave this room he means to know your little game." And suddenly his pistol hand was seized, gripped as in a vice and twisted.

"Drop that fool of a toy or else I'll knock you down!" exclaimed Old Mystery, and the revolver rattled on to the floor.

"You old ruffian!" said the younger man, "I don't want to struggle with a man of your years, let go my wrist or I'll call the police and give you into custody, and before you leave this room I will know what brought you here."

"If you weren't such a nervous, excitable idiot I was going to tell you at once," exclaimed old Mystery. "You let this fall from your pocket on the landing," and he laid upon the desk writing-table the £1,000 Bank of England note.

"Bless my soul!" cried Scrimshaw, clapping his hand in his breast pocket, "so I did. I say! I'm awfully sorry. The fact is, I'm a bit excited, I've been dining out to-night, and I've one or two very worrying things on my mind. Will you accept my apology?"

"Yes," grunted Old Mystery, "on condition that you keep those things out of sight when you meet me on the stairs in future."

"Oh, yes," said Scrimshaw hastily, "only somehow it gave me an awful turn—made me feel a bit creepy, you know, you loafing about the place at this time of night, like a ghost."

"It is as late for you as for me," said the other.

"Oh, yes, I know, only you see you're a bit of a mystery. Anyway, you're evidently a very honest man, and, look here, the man who voluntarily restores a thousand pounds deserves a substantial reward. As a matter of fact, I shouldn't have missed this for months, thinking I'd put it in this cash box. Now suppose I give you a ten pound note for yourself?"

"No, thanks," the other snapped out, "I don't want a reward for not being a thief."

Scrimshaw stared at him curiously.

"One moment, my friend," he said, "you're not pressed for time; will you smoke a cigar and drink a drop of whisky? I'd like to have a chat with you."

"I certainly wouldn't mind a drop of whisky and I'm partial to a good cigar," said the strange visitor, taking one from the open box and eyeing and handling it with the method of a connoisseur.

"Look here," said Scrimshaw, "you've interested me, first because you're a bit of a mystery, secondly, because it's pretty clear you're straight. Now, Mr——" He paused.

"Perhaps you had better call me Old Mystery."

Scrimshaw keenly scanned his visitor.

"Yes, you are a bit of a mystery, and I suppose you've got a bit of a life story: seen better days, eh?"

The other nodded.

Scrimshaw laughed contentedly.

"I haven't, but I'm hoping to, that's the difference between us."

"Quite so, your present times are the best you've ever had and you've the prospect of better, if you play your cards carefully."

"How do you know?" asked the other sharply.

"That doesn't matter. I do know, perhaps I know more than you think."

"Oh, lots of people know more than I do," laughed Scrimshaw, "at the clubs and houses I frequent I find no end of people who know more than I shall ever learn or ever want to about any number of things, except one, money-making, and, like you, they'll give me best at that."

"If they're like me, they won't."

"What!" exclaimed Scrimshaw, sitting up, "you haven't done much in that line?"

"That's more than you know."

"Well, yes, when I come to think of it, I should think you are a man who's capable of making money, the man who could hand over a thousand pounds that wouldn't have been missed must have a mind capable of dealing with big figures, and if it's true that every man has his price, and it seems to be, your price must be a very respectable one. And, tell me, after making money, how did you come to lose it?"

"Who said I did lose it?"

"But you haven't got much, eh? Excuse me being so personal, I'm getting more and more interested in you, Mr. Mystery. You know I'm a bit of a student of human nature, that is incidentally, my chief study is building a pile and I think I'm a bit of an honest man in that branch."

"Yes," said Old Mystery, "my friend, you think you know

In another moment he had the second scoundrel by the throat.

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all that is to be learnt, whereas, you've only just grasped the rudiments."

"I've done better than,you apparently."

"Apparently, perhaps, but smart men don't judge by smart appearances."

Scrimshaw for a moment mused, then in the most off-handed, casual manner he gave a Masonic sign. A mutual smile flitted over the faces of the men as it was returned.

"Now, look here, Mr. Mystery," said Scrimshaw sharply. "What do you know of business?"

"Not much! but ten times more than you do."

"Tut! tut! you've had your innings, what you've done has been done on the old methods, I'm the pioneer of the new."

"That's quite true, I've never worked on the new methods, though I've studied them. I did too well by the old, but I often felt inclined to try them, only the chains of environment held me down."

"And they don't now?"

"No, these chains are broken."

Scrimshaw rose from his chair, plunged his hands in his pockets, and paced his office in his favourite manner, that of a caged tiger, glancing ever and anon, furtively, at the visitor to his den.

"I can't make you out," he said, "though I've half a dozen theories about you. You've been a gentleman, you've held a good position, you may have made mistakes, don't be offended, you may have done time, no! I don't think that," for he noted that Old Mystery never blanched at that shot, and again he observed the smoothness of the fingertips of the white hand.

"You may have plunged and got out of your depth and found it better to drop out, or, perhaps, there was a lady in the case, you're just about at the susceptible age. Anyway, it's clear that for some reason or other you have chosen to efface an interesting individuality, and to lie low.

"Now a man who is clever, who is absolutely straight and who is content to lie low is worth to me—oh, a regiment of the crowd I see out there"—and he pointed to the untenanted desks and stools of his general office. "People who don't understand me would say that what I'm saying now isn't like me, but that's just because it doesn't suit me for everybody to understand me. You see, I'm a financier, and a financier's got to be a bit of a philosopher."

"I think you're a bit of a poet as well," said the other; "certainly your whisky and cigars are worthy of one. Only one more word, I can't work in a small way, I can't do small things."

"That's because," said Scrimshaw, "you're not a small man—and that's where you and I shall hit it."

Then they came to terms.

EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Ronald to the Rescue.

It was hardly to be supposed that a young fellow in Ronald's position could move to and fro in the Metropolis without occasionally encountering friends of former days, although he did his best to avoid such encounters, they being invariably calculated to revive unpleasant memories; but having been for the most part educated in Heidelberg, and having spent most of his vacations and leisure time in continental wanderings he had few acquaintances and fewer friends in England, scarcely any in London.

One morning it was Jim Redfern, newly called to the Bar, who, meeting him in the Strand, returned Ronald's instinctive nod of greeting with the most frigid of "How do you do's," and an immediate stare in an opposite direction. Evidently he had heard Eric's version of the story.

And on another occasion it was Tom Lorrimer, his old school fellow, who accosted him with a hearty:

"Hallo, Geldart, old chap, how are you bucking up? How goes it? I say, I hear you've lost your governor, read synopsis of his probate in the *Illustrated London News*. By Jove, old chap cut up pretty well, but what thundering hard lines to leave you entirely out of it. What on earth was the old boy's reason?"

Evidently Tom had not heard Eric's version.

"Well, what are you doing, old chap? Trying to get literary work, eh?" with a drop of the countenance. "Well, wish you luck, old man! I say, of course we're old pals, and if a fiver's any use to you—What? No thanks! Well, anyway, here's my card, and if I can do any good, don't forget. Good-bye, so long!"

But Ronald had made up his mind neither to beg nor borrow. He had set his mind upon his course, he knew the one walk in life he was fitted to tread, knew that once in the swim he could get his living honourably, fairly easily. He would do his best and strongest.

If that walk were shut to him, very well, then he was young and strong, he would work with his hands, there was the dock quay, there was the forge, and last—and, perhaps, best of all—there was the barrack square.

He had packed his traps, paid his bill, giving up his rooms at that expensive hotel. And now he was walking the streets of London—homeless, where the few people who knew him believed him to be a thief, the people he never wanted to meet again until his name was cleared, as cleared he swore it should be.

Till then he would avoid them. How best to do that? Should he leave London? He thought things over, and that his thoughts might be undisturbed by the roar of the traffic he turned into a narrow, quiet street.

A girl hurried past him, crossing over the road. He was so absorbed in his reflections that he noticed neither that she was trimly built, neatly and tastefully dressed and extremely pretty, nor that she was hurrying along, casting every now and then apprehensive glances behind her.

Neither did he observe that some ten seconds later she was followed by a couple of low-browed, evil-looking men. The shades of evening were falling, dusk was deepening into a premature darkness accelerated by a heavy, drizzling mist. And Ronald's thoughts were concentrated upon one question. Where was he to sleep that night?

Suddenly he was startled by the sound of a scream, from around a corner ahead across the road, the scream of a frightened girl. He quickened his steps. Again the scream arose on the murky, moistened air. He broke into a run, dashed across the road and round the opposite corner.

"Oh, don't—don't! You are choking me!" a girl's wailing voice, and in answer a hoarse, guttural oath followed by, "Let go the chain, then, or I'll choke you!"

"Now then, Mickey, land her a thick 'un and stop her screeching!"

"Can't! Ugh!" and the ruffian went down in a muddled heap, stunned by a crashing left-hander from Ronald, who, in another moment had the second scoundrel by the throat and dragging him away from the trembling, half-fainting girl, flung him across the dark and narrow slum, then snatching from the ground at her feet a watch and broken neck-chain, and with the other arm supporting the almost swooning girl, Ronald said hastily:

"Here, take your watch and chain! Don't move away, but scream for the police while I collar these villains!" And as the second man came for him again, with a swift, swinging right-hander full between the eyes, he felled him.

"Jimmy, got your knife? Slip it into 'im!" the brute rolling over and scrambling up shouted. But the other in a hoarse whisper exclaimed:

"No, no, he's too thick, cheese it and cut, the slops are comin'!" And taking to their heels they disappeared in the darkness, leaving Ronald supporting in his arms the sobbing, trembling girl.

"Stay here while I follow and catch them!" he exclaimed. But clinging to him she cried:

"Oh, no, no! Please don't leave me, sir, or I shall die of terror. They followed me for ever so far. I knew it, and I guessed they were in league, though they pretended to be apart, this neighbourhood's infested with them, please don't leave me!"

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"Very well," said Ronald, who was the soul of good temper and tenderness to women, young or old, "only, leave off crying, it's all right now, and your watch is safe. Have they taking anything else?"

"No, sir, I slipped my purse in my bosom."

"Have they hurt you?"

"They've bruised my neck and twisted my arm. Oh, if you hadn't come to my rescue! How can I thank you?"

"I haven't done much, except, I am happy to say, given a couple of rascals two of the heaviest blows I ever hit in my life. Now, shall I walk a little way home with you, or shall we find the police and describe these Thugs?"

"I think I'll get home if you don't mind walking a little way with me; I couldn't describe them, I am in such a nervous state."

"Well, anyway, one of them will have two black eyes," said Ronald complacently. "Come along, then, I'll walk with you. Take my arm."

"Thank you a thousand times," said the girl, and as she walked along clinging to her protector's arm she thought what different types of men seemed to make up even the little world in which she lived her humble life.

They passed along into wider, cleaner, better lighted streets, then, stopping at one door, she said, "I live here, sir, let me thank you once again."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Ronald. "You're heartily welcome, my only regret is that I hadn't the satisfaction of handing these Mohocks over to the police. Good night!"

"Good night, sir," said the girl, "and thanks again. My name's Phyllis Daventry," and she paused inquiringly.

"What a pretty name, very suitable to so charming a young lady! Good night!" Raising his hat he was gone, leaving her standing at her door, her question not answered.

But she murmured as she watched his disappearing form:

"Whatever his name may be, and whatever his station, he's a thorough gentleman, and a dear good fellow."

* * * * *

Ronald, strolling along, carefully wiping with his handkerchief from his knuckles the traces of his encounter, suddenly paused before the railings of a clean-looking, almost drearily respectable and sober-looking house, his eye caught by a placard in the front window, "Paying Guests Received."

Ascending the steps he complied with the request upon the brass plate to knock and ring, and a diminutive servant wearing a white cap, and bib apron, and a black smudge at the end of a tip-tilted nose, more or less like the petals of a flower, inquired, "Who might he want?"

He explained a desire to interview the lady of the house, whereupon the diminutive domestic disappeared, leaving him in the hall after a momentary undecided look at an array of coats, hats, and umbrellas, and a reassuring survey of the caller.

A few moments later a portly lady of somewhat severe aspect, her hands folded across her ample bosom, sailed into the hall remarking:

"I am the lady of the house, but I think you have the advantage of me."

"I observe," said Ronald smiling, "that you take in paying guests."

"I receive paying guests," the lady replied somewhat frigidly, as though suspecting an aspersion in the challenge, "and my name is Mrs. Skimper. May I ask yours?"

For a moment he reflected. He had cast off the old life, had decided to let the old name go. What name henceforth should he bear? He thought of his second Christian name and of the third that had been the dear dead mother's maiden name and he answered, "My name is Harvey Bligh," whereupon he was requested to step into the drawing-room.

And so it happened that when next morning Mrs. Skimper took her accustomed seat at the head of the breakfast-table her paying guests were morally convinced that something unexpected and as pleasant as unexpected had happened.

As to the nature of the event they were not quite certain. Perhaps Mr. Springle had ceased to unsettle their hostess and had settled her bill. Possibly Arethusa, the slave of the myriad bells, had risen at the third, even the second, but no, not the first time of asking, that required too great a stretch of imagination.

Could it be—oh, joyful thought, that the drawing-room piano had been seized for over-due instalments, and that Miss Amaranth's performances thereon were to be numbered with the terrors of the past? Or possibly Mr. Grimmage, whose incessant sneers and growls were the bane of Mrs. Skimper's existence, had carried out at last his daily threat and definitely given notice, a consummation devoutly to be wished.

For Mrs. Skimper beamed on all and sundry, even including Mr. Springle in the radiance of her smile. But speculation was put at rest by the worthy lady's own announcement that the circle for whom she provided home comforts was about to be enlarged by a new arrival.

"A Mr. Harvey Bligh," she added, whereat the radiance of her own features communicated itself to those of Miss Amaranth, a young lady who made eyes at every new male arrival from a time whereof the memory of Mrs. Skimper's paying guests ran not to the contrary. "Isn't it charming?"

"Don't see where the charm comes in," said Mr. Grimmage, "it simply means so far as we are concerned the increase of the divisor of the sum total of the commissariat, and the reduction of the fraction." And Mrs. Skimper, while not comprehending Mr. Grimmage's meaning, realised thas his intention was to be nasty from the callous laughter it evoked, and as usual revenged herself upon the hapless Springle for the vengeful thrust of the more unpleasant, but infinitely more, punctually paying guest.

That evening Miss Amaranth came down to dinner in a new blouse, Mr. Grimmage trotted out a new grievance, and Mr. Horace Springle brought to Bloomsbury Square a new excuse for the non-payment of his bill.

Miss Amaranth, it should be mentioned, represented music in the Skimperian temple, and punished the strings of Mrs. Skimper's piano, and the nerves of Mrs. Skimper's paying guests from early morn to dewy eve.

She was a little dot of a body with a romantic disposition

"I'm told her Royal Highness is most domesticated—makes steak and kidney puddings with her own hands."

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and an aggravatingly red nose, entirely out of harmony with the poetical aspirations of her nature. But she was a good little soul, and once away from the piano as harmless as a child, indeed considerably more so.

Mr. Grimmage was understood to be connected with the Civil Service, a circumstance which perhaps accounted for the incivility of his manner; he passed his days in bullying solicitors' office boys across a brass wire grating, and his evenings in more or less withering Mrs. Skimper and her paying guests with sarcasm, which, if not particularly original, was at all events invested with the dignity of labour.

Mr. Springle's leading features were a loud manner and louder waistcoats, an abnormally high collar and low breeding. He was understood to be something in the City; no one knew quite what, but the consensus of opinion was that it was not much.

He was generally understood to be in the offices of the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange Limited, but in what capacity no one at Mrs. Skimper's was perfectly sure, the guesses ranging from managing director to messenger. His ideals were the leading comedians of the variety stage and the Hebes of the bars.

Miss Amaranth was in the seventh heaven, for she found herself seated beside a good-looking, good-tempered youngster with the manners of a gentleman—a somewhat novel experience at Mrs. Skimper's—and one who extended the little courtesies of the dinner-table so gracefully that she longed for more condiments to be asked for.

Even with the soup stage Ronald had unconsciously made an impression; before the exit of the fish and the advent of the roast it had deepened into a conquest, greatly to the indignation of both Messrs. Grimmage and Springle, who were so accustomed to snubbing the harmless, amiable and lonely little old maid, that they conceived a resentment against the newcomer who so presumptuously set them an example of gentlemanly behaviour.

There was also present a Mrs. Marwell, who wore a black lace cap with ribbons, and regaled the company from time to time with scraps of information from the *Court Circular* regarding the movements of their Majesties and the Royal Family, and, seated opposite her a Mr. Dodgerson, a portly, florid-faced elderly gentleman, whose principal characteristic was being at times aggravatingly hard of hearing, and at other times still more aggravatingly acute in that faculty, both the times and the other times being generally inconvenient.

"Oh, thank you so much," said Miss Amaranth, taking the pepper from Ronald's hand with a contact with her own intended to be thrilling, and a glance designed to be more so. "Do you believe in the occult?"

"I can't say I'm very much interested in it," he replied.

"Aren't you? I think it delightful; I think everything delightful that you don't understand; things that one understands are generally so uninteresting. Do you know, I'm a palmist; I wish you'd let me read your hand."

"I see the King has brought a new motor-car," said Mrs. Marwell, "and the Duchess of Argyle is going to open a soup kitchen at Poplar."

"Rot!" said Mr. Dodgerson.

"Sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Marwell, with a glare.

"Allow me to tell you, madam, that such sentiments are very unbecoming."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Sauce tureen? Certainly. Madam, allow me to remark when you declare his gracious Majesty to be unpopular you're talking nonsense!"

"I never said anything of the kind," remarked Mrs. Marwell.

"Oh, never mind him, he's a deaf old josser!" observed Mr. Springle reassuringly.

"I'll tell you what, sir," said Mr. Dodgerson, "if you don't apologise for that remark, as soon as the ladies have gone through that door I'll send you through that window," and while Mr. Springle was hastily explaining that he had said nothing of the kind, Miss Amaranth went on, scanning Ronald's hand.

"Ah, this is a most interesting line of life; when you were very young you had an illness."

"Yes—measles at five, I've been told."

"I knew it!" she went on triumphantly; "your path was rosy till you reached sixteen and then," she sighed, "a great calamity befell you."

"Really!" he exclaimed, anxious for information.

"Yes, you conceived a romantic but, alas! a hopeless attachment."

"I'm afraid you're a little wrong in the dates," said Ronald, conscious of at that age cherishing two objects in life, cricket and "footer," to the exclusion of any heart affection.

"But," she went on, "consolation awaits you, soon, ah! sooner perhaps than you anticipate you will meet with one who will console you for the blighting of your boyhood's dream."

"I'm told her Royal Highness is most domesticated, makes steak and kidney puddings with her own hands."

"Perhaps that accounts for the rumours of a separation," said Mr. Grimmage.

"Ha! ha! that ain't half bad!" laughed Springle; "that reminds me of Billy Blarer's new song:

"'*To be my lawful missus*
I did Jemima take;
What broke our happy home up
Was Jemima's home-made cake.'"

"What did you say, sir?" cried Mr. Dodgerson wrathfully, "I'm a bit of a rake; how dare——"

In the course of the repudiation and explanation the ladies rose, and Miss Amaranth whispered: "When you come into the drawing-room I'll sing; mind, I shall be singing it for you, my new song, 'For Years I've Yearned for Thee.'"

"I say, you are a-going it!" exclaimed Mr. Springle, addressing Ronald after exchanging a wink with Mr. Grimmage.

Ronald, uncertain whether the impertinence was meant for him, went on lighting a cigarette; and Springle, imagining he had found a smart butt, went on, "I told her lots of times she'd only got to wait long enough for a flat to come along; but, I say! if you're after the shekels she's only got £75 a year, and it dies with her, and she can't touch it."

"Have you been addressing me all this time?" asked Ronald, and Mr. Springle replied:

"Of course I have; what do *you* think?"

"I think," said Ronald, "you're an impertinent young puppy!"

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Springle, endeavouring to work up an explosion.

"I also think," said Ronald, leisurely walking round to Mr. Springle's side of the table, "that I shall pull your nose!" Whereupon seizing Mr. Springle's collar with his left hand, with his right he suited the action to the word. He then quietly walked out of the room amid a dead silence, for even Mr. Grimmage felt that on the new arrival sarcasm was thrown away.

Forgetting, perhaps oblivious of Miss Amaranth's promise, he went to his room and occupied himself till bed-time with the advertisement-sheet of a daily paper answering the likeliest of the innumerable "Wanted's" crowding its columns.

For although he had confidently determined to fight and win life's battle under the banner of Captain Pen he recognised that inclination was not the only qualification for enlistment in those ranks; knew that while the grass was growing Pegasus might starve if no other fodder were forthcoming, therefore he set out in quest of a "work by the way."

The next evening he was similarly employed, and the next, and then ensued a period of weary waiting in vain, watching every post that came his hopes raised to a height of expectancy that made the fall all the more crushing.

Many of the advertisements invited personal application, and Ronald spent his days in answering these, taking his

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place at the end of a weary, dreary queue of applicants, only to find that he had passed the best years of his youth acquiring a deal of knowledge but apparently nothing that would enable him to get his bread.

And Ronald by degrees arrived at the conclusion that a man requires to work harder and know a great deal more to earn seventy-five pounds a year than seven hundred, and that it is far easier for labouring men, hewers of wood and drawers of water, to obtain employment at from twenty-five to thirty shillings a week than for the possessor of a classical education and a couple of modern languages.

He thought of the stage and made sundry calls at sundry stage-doors, inquiring of stage-door keepers, invariably grumpy and invariably engaged in meals, for managers who were invariably out or busily engaged, while ladies of abnormally yellow hair measured him with supercilious glances up and down, and blue-shaven gentlemen scowled at him suspiciously.

On such rare occasions as Ronald managed to catch the ear of some deputy-assistant acting manager, or other official, he was impressively and emphatically assured that of all the overcrowded professions and callings in overcrowded London town, *the* profession was the most overcrowded; it occurring to Ronald that possibly the reason of so much talent being crowded out lay in so much incompetency being crowded in.

He had rather fancied himself as an amateur actor, and as such had been greatly in request, but he reluctantly came to the conclusion that theatrical London had no need of him, and so he resumed the dreary task of seeking in the advertisements some "wanted" that he could supply.

And it was while waiting for his turn at one of these heart-sickening levees that Ronald was recognised by Mr. Springle, who still deeply resented his fellow-guest having not only put his nose out of joint metaphorically, but having literally pulled it.

Accordingly Mr. Springle took the earliest opportunity on the evening following his meeting Mr. Harvey Bligh, to give Ronald the name he had adopted, of publishing that circumstance at Mrs. Skimper's dinner-table.

"Get the berth, Mr. Bligh?" he inquired in a strident tone; and "Mr. Bligh" coloured to his temples, as, with a curt negative, he engaged in conversation with Miss Amaranth on his left.

But Mr. Springle was not to be baffled.

"Thought you wouldn't," he went on, "it was five-and-twenty against you in numbers, and some of them chaps carried more guns than you, not that you lost much; I've heard that firm sweats their invoice clerks horrid, and the billet was only five-and-twenty bob a week."

Mrs. Skimper pricked up her ears. Could it be possible that this Mr. Bligh was a mere invoice clerk and out of employment at that?

Why, she angrily reflected, he had been obtaining, if not goods, politeness under false pretences, and while she remembered with thankfulness that Mr. Bligh had paid her first week's bill without querying a single extra, she began to tremble for her second.

Mr. Grimmage audibly sniggered, and launched into a dissertation on the competition in the cheap clerk market, seizing on the opportunity of retaliating on the newcomer, who had dared a few minutes earlier to severely snub him for studied rudeness to Miss Amaranth.

That evening Ronald found himself distinctly left in the cold by Mrs. Skimper and her paying-guests, and he was conscious of, and to some extent amused by, under the cover of Miss Amaranth's piano-playing, a running fire of undertoned comment, the import of which he gathered more by instinct than hearing.

"I thought he was a real swell!" chuckled Mr. Springle, "from the way he's togged out, and the airs he gave himself—I tell you you could have knocked me down with a feather when I saw him standing in line with that down-at-heel lot. As Charlie Cheesit says in his latest:

"'*It ain't the sealskin coat as makes the lady,*
It ain't the clobber makes the millionaire,
A chap who's broke may wear a shiny cadey;
You should never judge your pals by what they wear.'"

Partly amused, partly nettled by the frigidity of his social atmosphere, Ronald, throwing himself into a chair carelessly took up the first periodical that came to hand and for a while turned over its leaves.

It happened to be the current week's *M.A.P.*, and at last his eyes rested upon an autographical article under the heading "In the Days of My Youth," contributed by an author whose works had always interested him, and Ronald, who was somewhat of a voracious reader, speedily found himself interested in his reading matter, and oblivious to not only the manner, but the very existence of those around him.

It was the story of a strenuous battle, for not only fame and fortune, but, in its earlier stages, the very means of livelihood, and Ronald, with a keen and sympathetic interest, read how the man whose works were read throughout the civilised world, whose editions were snapped up by a clamouring and insensate public as fast as they appeared, had in earlier years, footsore and disheartened, tramped Fleet Street and the Strand, with his heart as heavy as his pockets were light, and his unsaleable scripts beneath his arm.

And now it made a man's mouth water to read how fortune deluged him with her favours, the prices he received per page, per column, per line! Why to that man every blank sheet of paper, given a pen and ink, was a bank note. The work, by the way, was not for him. He would press forward to his desired goal blind to all byways.

Among his traps there was a trunk filled with a medley of manuscripts, product of idle hours, and that night before retiring, he rummaged through the collection, selecting such wares as he deemed fittest for the market, and on the morrow he set out upon his mission. It was his forlorn hope, but it is the forlorn hope that wins the Victoria Cross!

(Another long instalment of this story will appear next week.)

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An Evil Benefactor.

Telling of a Jealous Man's Scheme of Revenge.

. . Containing the Incident Depicted on the Cover. .

MONA BARRON lay back in the comfortable deck-chair of the *Salva*, Mr. David Gretton's yacht, and closed her eyes dreamily. The air on shore was hot and stifling; it would be quite a delight to have a run in the open for a few miles, catching the breezes which flecked the waves half a mile out!

How good Mr. Gretton had been, and still was, to her and her mother. He had been an artist friend of her father, whose career was commercial.

The friendship appeared to have originated just before Mr. Barron met his future wife; it ripened as time went on, although Mrs. Barron had had an idea that Gretton became more distant in his manner for a time just prior to the marriage. When Mr. Barron met with his misfortune in business and died, leaving his wife and child in very poor circumstances, Gretton had delicately assisted them.

"He must have been much attached to father!" thought the girl, unconscious that Gretton was watching her keenly. "Perhaps father did him a good turn, saved his life or something. I declare that I have never once thought of asking mamma! His guardianship, if I may call it so, was self-constituted, and I have grown up to regard it as the most natural thing in the world. But, of course, these things do not happen of their own sweet will. He might have been my father!"

Mona was awaking to a better knowledge of certain facts, evidently, for the last thought made her open her eyes and look about for Gretton; he was at that moment standing with his back to her. The yacht was just getting clear of the shallow water, and the gentle rolling soothed the girl and made her close her eyes again. She was a good sailor.

"Now, that's strange," she mused. "I have always looked upon him as old, and it never occurred to me till this minute that he is not. I am twenty-one, and I don't believe that he is over forty! Anyhow, in looks he doesn't seem to be more than thirty-five. He was younger than father; I should say that he is mother's age. It really appears out-of-place to regard him as old, now I think of it."

Mona enjoyed the rocking of the yacht; it lulled her almost into a doze. Her thoughts ran on lazily.

"He paid for my schooling and he helped ever so much, for the sake of old times, he says; he is a lonely man without others to think about, so he thinks of us. I am sorry that mamma could not come with us on this trip—and I hope that we shall be back by the time Cyril arrives. Still, foolish boy, he couldn't be jealous of Mr. Gretton."

The idea of her lover, Cyril Thornton, being jealous of David Gretton, amused her; she allowed a ripple of laughter to escape from the rosy lips. At that instant something came between her and the refreshing breeze, and she looked up to see Gretton gazing at her with an expression of mingled gravity and enjoyment.

"Mr. Gretton," said Mona idly, "you really shouldn't. It isn't fair to stop the free passage of the cooling breeze."

"I beg your pardon, Mona," he said quickly, moving aside. He had called her Mona since childhood. "Do you like it? You ought to get up and walk about now; we are getting nicely outside, and you will like it all the better."

"I am just a little doubtful of that," she replied nonchalantly. "At any rate, I shall stay here for a while. Don't you think it would be a charitable thing to do, to sit down here and tell me—oh, anything you like by way of killing time?"

There was an attractiveness in the girl's manner that most men found to be irresistible. To absolute strangers, meeting her for the first time, it might have seemed flippant, but to those who knew Mona it was quite otherwise. It was simple trustfulness; she was free from worldliness, and imputed nothing but good intentions to other people.

David Gretton drew a chair close to hers and seated himself with suppressed eagerness. "It is good to be near you!" he said significantly.

Mona was surprised and just a trifle confused, as a slight flush testified. Those were the very words used by Cyril, on the occasion of their last meeting—the never-to-be-forgotten occasion when he asked her if she would wear a ring for his sake. Why had Mr. Gretton said the same? She felt an inward agitation and she refrained from looking at him. Yet it was absurd to connect the two things!

"It is very good to be where there is some air to breathe," she replied lightly, with a desire to turn the conversation. "How far do you propose to run out?"

"I do not know," was the evasive answer. "Are you anxious to get back by a certain time?"

"Yes," said Mona, without reflection. "That is," she added quickly, "I wish to be on shore when—I mean, I ought not to leave mamma alone too long, ought I?"

There was no answer to her question, which disturbed Mona; she turned her head just enough to enable her to see David Gretton from the corner of her eye, and she was startled by the eager, yearning expression; and, included in that expression was a something indefinable, a something wolfish. The situation was mystifying.

"I think I will take your advice now and walk up and down," she remarked, with pretended ease, as she sprang lightly to her feet. "Will you not be wanted to help in sailing the yacht?"

"Not for a few moments. Are you anxious to get rid of me?"

"Oh, no," cried Mona in distress. She did not wish to hurt his feelings, but she was sorry that his assistance was not needed.

"What is it?" she thought. "I—almost wish—that I hadn't come. He has never been like this before; I wonder—— It is so strange; I might be inclined to think that he was going to make love to me, but that seems absurd."

The yacht was going along steadily. The man at the wheel had an easy time, but he kept casting anxious glances at the sky. Gretton went over to him, leaving Mona for

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a couple of minutes, during which time he exchanged some earnest words with his subordinate.

"Let us go below," said Gretton, a few minutes later. "the breeze is stiffening, and we shall be blown about up here. It will be cool enough in the cabin, and I have something to tell you."

With a vague misgiving, Mona acceded silently to the proposal; Gretton led the way, and, on reaching the small but comfortably-furnished cabin, he placed her on the lounge and took a seat by her side.

She dared not look at his face. She heard his deep and laboured breathing, which indicated that he was at that moment a prey to strong emotion, and she felt herself trembling.

The ring on the third finger of her left hand seemed to be burning her, as if to remind her that she had plighted her troth to a good man and true, and that she must be faithful to him. "Never fear, Cyril," the thought flashed through her mind; "I will be as true to you as the sun is to the heavenly bodies which depend upon it."

"Mona, I want you."

The words were full of suppressed passion. Mona's trembling ceased: the hour of trial was at hand, and her courage increased with the demand made upon it.

"I do not quite understand you, Mr. Gretton," she said slowly, turning her beautiful eyes upon him and repressing the start which his appearance engendered. "What do you mean?"

There was really no need to ask that question; his sentence, the fierce light in his eyes, the quivering of his whole frame indicated that he was madly in love with her.

"You do not *quite* understand?" he cried, echoing her words. "Then you *do* understand. But I will tell you plainly what I mean. It is pleasing to a woman to hear a man say that he loves her, and why should I ask you, whom I adore and who are dearer to me than all else—why should I ask you to forego the sweetness of that blissful experience by assuming that you know what I am about to say?

"Mona, I love you," he seized her hand; his fingers tightened in a nervous grip about her fingers and pressed Cyril's ring against the flesh till her imagination made it feel as if it were burning her, and she longed to shriek aloud with the pain. "Mona, I love you, wholly, passionately! My love is consuming me, and you must promise to be my wife before we go ashore again."

He sank on his knees before her; he poured out his soul to her in burning words, which at first appeared to scorch her ears and her brain, but afterwards fell dully, unintelligibly upon her because she was dazed by them.

She felt powerless to stem the flood of barely coherent outpourings, but as he raised himself to draw her nearer to him, that he might kiss the pallid cheek—so strangely unlike his own flushed face—she shook herself free from his grasp and stood erect.

"Mr. Gretton," she cried haughtily. "You forget. Even if you had not known that Cyril Thornton and I were affianced, this ring"—pointing to the golden circlet—"should have commanded your respect."

He also had risen to his feet. He laughed mockingly as she held her left hand slightly raised in order to make the ring more visible.

"*That!*" he sneered. "A boy's gift! What does he know of love? And you—you think you love him, but it is nothing. *I* will teach you what love is, and you will be happy above all others."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Gretton," she replied coldly. "I am sorry for this, but we can forget it. I wish to go back at once. Please have the yacht's course altered and let us go back to shore."

The quiet determination in her tone could not be mistaken; Gretton noticed it, and it evidently came as a shock to him. He seated himself on the couch and gazed steadily at the girl, whose haughtiness of manner made her more beautiful.

"You refuse me?" he asked in a tone that indicated that he was not able to realise the fact. "Have I heard aright? Have you fully considered?"

"Yes," she said more gently. She felt sorry for him. "I regret that this incident has taken place; I am sorry that you have made a mistake. I love Cyril Thornton!"

All doubt on his part was swept aside by the manner in which she made that last statement.

As she watched him, she saw a peculiar change come over his features. His cheeks lost their flush, the expression of the eyes altered from one of passionate longing to that of a man who is bent on calmly crushing some victim of his hatred, while the lips parted in an evil smile.

"I see that I may take your decision as final!" he said with a bow. "Good! Then I fall back on my original scheme, the one which I have cherished and worked for during all these years! Sit here and listen to the story I have to tell you, and then I will show you some pictures with the drawing and painting of which I have amused myself on and off for the last two years!"

Fascinated by the cold glitter of his eyes, Mona obeyed him mechanically. She sat down at the head of the couch; he took a sketch-book from a drawer and placed it on his knees, ready to be opened at the right moment.

He spoke in measured tones, without a trace of emotion; it was a striking contrast to his outburst of a few minutes previous, yet the very coldness of his voice and manner impressed her more than his fiery declaration of love had done.

"I have been good to your mother and you ever since you were a baby; you both say so, and it is true!" he began. "People say that I was your father's friend, hence my benevolence. They speak falsely! I was your father's enemy!

"Ha! It surprises you? Yet it is true! He upset a scheme on which I had staked a good deal! He knew what he was doing and he thought it right to do it, but he did not know that I was the prime mover in it."

"I know what that was!" the girl burst forth. "He upset a villainous plot for the promotion of a company and he saved the small fortunes and the savings of thousands. They never realised how much they owed to him, and so they did not help him in his own trouble, but I am proud of his memory!"

"Just so!" said Gretton sarcastically. "Well, I was the prime mover in the plot and I vowed a fearful revenge! I was the man in the background, so your father did not suspect me, and it was easy for me to make his acquaintance and become friendly with him in the execution of my plan of revenge. Your father also did me a wrong in another way; I had fallen secretly in love with a woman, and—he proposed to her and was accepted! That is your mother!"

"A wrong!" cried the girl scornfully.

"That is what *I* call it!" replied Gretton coolly, "and it is on that assumption that I have worked. I have won, so far! But listen!

"I brought ruin on your father! Ha, my story is beginning to have an effect! I saw him die in anguish at the thought that he was leaving his wife and child to the mercies of a cruel, ungrateful world, and I did nothing to ease him."

"Fiend!" gasped the girl, a pain contracting her heart.

"You may call me names if it pleases you!" retorted Gretton. "After his death, I became benevolent!" He laughed in his enjoyment. "I took care of both of you; I helped you. But all the while, now and then, I have (through the agency of friends) made your mother feel the disgrace which has rested on your father's name by reason of his failure. She does not believe the rumour which others accepted so readily, that the failure was a disgraceful one, but she has to bear the stigma, and I take care that she shall feel it from time to time! Of course it was I who originated the rumour!"

Nothing could equal the callous cruelty of the man who was thus torturing the girl to whom he had made violent love only a few short minutes ago. It was one of those freaks of human nature which, unhappily, are not so rare as one would be glad to think!

"Well," he continued, "I cherished the hope of one day dealing her a crushing blow. I made up my mind that, when you were old enough to have an idea of what life is and

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when she was doting upon you, I would kill you!" Mona was too horrified to utter even an exclamation of dismay. "I have drawn and painted scenes of various ways in which I would kill you!" continued the wretch. "You must look at them! They are all well executed, and you form the central figure in all! The last one is the method I have chosen!"

Was this man mad? No, Mona could not say that he was, terrible as it was to suppose that he was deliberately saying this with the full knowledge of what he was doing!

She saw the pictures as he turned them over, one by one; she was obliged to look at them, she could not take her eyes from them. They were masterly paintings. In each one she saw herself suffering death in some form or other. The last one she recognised as that appropriate to the circumstances of the moment.

"There!" he cried, shutting up the book. "When I had finally decided, a strange thing happened; I fell in love with my victim! My love increased; I tried to fight against it, but it mastered me. Then I heard of your engagement, but I said to myself that I should conquer! If you had said 'Yes!' you would have saved your life and spared your mother the agony that awaits her! Will you change your mind?"

"I cannot!" cried Mona, springing up. "Help! Help! The two men will assist me!"

"They are in my pay!" hissed Gretton, grasping her wrists. We can easily arrange to save ourselves! A storm is arising; the yacht will sink, but we shall not pull out the plugs from the holes made in the bottom till we are near a vessel. It will be an ordinary wreck, and no suspicion will fall upon us!"

She struggled to wrench herself free, but he held her tightly while he told her of the grief of mother and lover. Then he forced her back suddenly and placed something against her nostrils, and all was blank.

A dash of something cold on her face was her next sensation. Mona had no need to open her eyes in order to comprehend her position. She had seen it in the picture which, with incredible refinement of cruelty, Gretton had painted and shown to her.

She was tied to a piece of timber which she had seen on the deck of the yacht, the cords were passed round her body and ankles, her arms hanging loosely, her hair was flowing in the wind.

She was being tossed about on the water, the sport of the waves, first on the crest of a billow and then in the trough of the sea. She could tell that the wind had risen and was blowing half a gale; the sky was overcast, a storm was imminent. No friendly vessel was near; alone on the wide sea her fate was a matter of merely a brief space of time!

Her own fate did not trouble her; the terror of it had passed away in the thought of the agony of her lover and mother when her lifeless and bruised body should be found and carried to them!

The words of Gretton came back to her with fearful vividness, he had intended that they should! He had given her a word-picture of the scene that would follow, and Mona cried aloud in bitterness of spirit that the dear ones might be spared this blow!

Suddenly a great squall of wind swept over the sea and for a moment she was submerged. It came just as she was asking aloud why the perpetrators of this crime should escape. Mona knew it not, but that squall caught the yacht unprepared for a sudden veering of the wind, and it heeled her over like a toy, without warning.

One man was below and he was drowned in the vessel; Gretton and the other man found themselves in the water, clinging to a plank. They held on to their frail raft like grim death, but presently, as a wave took them, they saw a heavy piece of timber, with a white-robed figure bound to it, being hurled towards them in the choppy sea.

With a cry of dismay they tried to push their plank out of its course, but it struck them violently, and when it had passed over them and they rose to the surface they were incapable of further mischief! It was a just and appropriate punishment; they had been sent to their long account by the intermediary of the instrument which had been utilised for the sacrifice of Mona!

The squall subsided as suddenly as it had arisen and the sea became calm; it reminded old sailors of the time when the ill-fated training ship *Eurydice* went down in the Channel. Mona's beam rested on the surface and the water rippled against it almost playfully.

The coastguard had noted the disappearance of the yacht, and a lifeboat was sent out to save the crew if they were floating on the waves. To their intense astonishment, they found Mona, and, cutting her free, they took her into the boat and brought her unconscious to shore.

The home-coming of Mona was sad, but not the misfortune that Gretton had designed. Mrs. Barron was unaware of what had happened till two hours later, by which time Mona had been restored to life. Cyril Thornton, having been delayed, did not arrive till evening and was spared much of the pain that would otherwise have fallen to his lot.

Mona did not relate all the details of the short cruise in the *Salva*, but she had to explain that Gretton had tied her to the timber and sent her adrift out of revenge.

The statement was disbelieved at first, but it was so evident that the yacht was overturned too suddenly to give anyone time to do such a thing merely as a measure of safety, that people were forced to believe it. They concluded that Gretton had gone mad, but Mona knew better, although she did not contradict the report.

The severe nervous shock, occasioned by the terrible ordeal through which she had passed, necessitated a prolonged stay abroad and a complete change of scene. Mrs. Barron, having lost her vengeful benefactor, had scarcely any resources to fall back on, so Cyril Thornton came to the rescue. Mrs. Barron objected at first, declaring that it was not fair to him.

"I can work," she said with calm dignity, "and I would have worn my fingers to the bone and have brought Mona up to work in a factory for her living rather than have touched a farthing of that money! No, Mr. Thornton, I cannot accept!"

"Mona is to be my wife," urged the young man, "and I want her to be strong. So she must go away, and you must go with her to take care of her, because I insist! I have the right to insist, have I not, dearest?" he added to his future wife.

So Mrs. Barron yielded. And, just as misfortunes do not always come singly, so does it occasionally happen that strokes of good fortune tread quickly on one another. On the very wedding-day Mrs. Barron received from Gretton's solicitor some notes found in his late client's private drawer, and those notes exculpated her husband and vindicated her own steadfast belief in his integrity!

George Day.

"What do you consider the hardest problem of a man's existence?" "Getting his own consent to crawl out of bed in the morning."

Thirteen young women died last year on the day named for their wedding. And yet young ladies continue to run the risk of meeting a similar fate.

"How in the world, Mrs. Wisely, do you manage to have all of your three daughters in so early when they spend the evening out?" "The last one home has to get breakfast next morning."

Alice: "Marie was so annoyed. She heard that a certain concern was using her photograph as an advertisement——" Grace: "You don't mean it!" Alice: "Yes, and when she investigated the matter she found it wasn't her photograph at all."

"I think, Charlie," said Mrs. Smallface to her hopeful, "that I shall put you into long trousers very soon." "But not until after Christmas, ma?" "Why not?" "Oh, because you know, ma, I shall have to go into short stockings, and they don't hold much."

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A Question of Disposition.

A Story which Proves that Eavesdropping Does Not Pay.

Miss Eva Braxton was nervously happy, and the cause of this peculiar state of mind was very simple. Mr. John Morgan had proposed on the previous evening and had intimated his intention of calling to see Mr. Braxton on the following afternoon and formally asking his consent to the marriage.

In ordinary circumstances, the lady would naturally feel both happy and nervous during the time that her lover was interviewing his prospective father-in-law, even although she might feel quite positive that father would raise no objection. In this instance, however, the nervousness was due to a double cause.

Miss Braxton had begun by feeling nervous in the usual way, but all at once a thought struck her and increased the feeling.

Why was he so long in returning to her in the drawing-room? It surely could not be that papa had raised any objection? Then it must be that John was discussing this transaction as he did almost every other. It seemed absurd, but she was bound to admit that it would be just like him!

This is how it was. Mr. Braxton and John Morgan had become great friends during the past twelve months or so. They lived near to one another; their business brought them frequently together in the City, and in spite of the difference of fifteen years in age, they suited each other admirably. The friendship had grown to such an extent that the one would scarcely take any step without consulting the other.

For these reasons it seemed that the marriage was most desirable; it would be a source of happiness to Mr. Braxton as well as to the young people. John Morgan was only thirty-two—seven years older than Eva. He would welcome the proposal warmly. But it was just there that the vexatious thought came in.

"John is so accustomed to discuss everything with father that it is more than probable that he will actually ask father some questions about my personal qualifications!" said Eva. "I don't think it would strike either of them as out-of-the-way; they are used to it.

"Father would naturally think a great deal of me, but he is such a strange man, and has been away so much, that he does not know me so well as some people, and he would honestly discuss me.

"I am not angry at the idea that he would say anything against me, because I know he wouldn't and couldn't!" (This last word very emphatically.) "But it is the idea of being overhauled that vexes me!"

Then Miss Eva Braxton smiled and shook herself, figuratively. What nonsense was this? She was foolish!

She tried to dismiss the subject and make herself easy with a book for a few minutes longer; but it was too difficult a task, and the thought came back and settled on her like a nightmare.

She was apt to be quick to take offence and just as quick to be sorry for the outburst. The long absence of her lover—he had been gone quite twenty minutes—irritated her.

"I'll go after him!" she decided.

And she lost no more time. Passing from the drawing-room in the front to the apartment behind it, where she expected to find her father and her lover, she saw the door standing open and one glance showed her that the room was empty. Where were they?

The blinds were down, for the sun streamed through the windows into that room during the afternoon and made it unbearably warm. She was about to pass on when the sound of voices came to her ears. The windows were open, to let in such air as might be puffing lazily about, and it was through the open French window that the sound of voices came to her.

"They are outside," murmured Eva. "I'll go to them."

She crossed the apartment, her feet making no noise on the soft carpet, and stood behind the blinds.

Just as she was about to pull the blind aside and pass through the window, the old notion came back to her with greater force, and she resolved to wait a minute and listen.

"I usually ask you for your opinion on anything that interests me," Tom was saying, "and this is a matter that affects you more than most transactions. Then you think she really will suit?"

"Well, John, I do not know that I can be so positive as that," said Mr. Braxton deprecatingly. "In giving my opinion, I have, it is true, spoken from my experience, but at the same time I have borne in mind what others have said. I cannot, as you will understand, give so reliable a verdict as others."

"Then he *is* talking me over, and, worse than all, my father is speaking diffidently about his daughter!"

Eva's face reddened with anger; she was wrathful enough to have confronted them on the spot and put them both to shame, but her curiosity got the better of her annoyance, and she decided to listen to a few more of their choice observations concerning herself.

Her father refrained from giving a decisive opinion because he had been abroad and he left it to others, to strangers, to give a correct verdict! As if their opinions would not be biassed by jealousy!

"You see, she must have a gentle disposition or she won't be manageable if anything happens to disturb her ordinary running," said John, in a grave tone. "I've heard that she can show temper, and a good deal of it, at times, and that's what makes me nervous about her. I heard that only this morning, and it worried me, because, you see, I have as good

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as settled the affair! I absolutely must have one with a quiet disposition!"

"A quiet disposition!" murmured Eva sneeringly. "I suppose I must be as meek as a lamb, not daring to open my mouth under any provocation, while you, the lord and master, can throw the things about and 'say things,' as you slangily put it! Worried, oh? Because you have as good as settled the affair? Oh, you can be released at once!"

"—— worry about that!" were the next words heard by the irate young lady behind the blind. They were spoken by her father.

"No," said John reflectively. "I suppose I could cry off by paying a small forfeit! Otherwise she is not a bad creature. A little too thin, perhaps, occasionally throws her legs out too much in running—not so graceful as she might be, but I can wink at that."

"Oh, that isn't much to grumble about in the circumstances, because she is for everyday use, so to say. She wouldn't make any show at all among the more aristocratic creatures in the Row; but you don't want her for that or I would say 'Don't have her!' You want one that is quiet, easy to drive, and not likely to make a fuss!"

"Exactly!" agreed John. "But I'm disturbed about what I heard this morning, and I won't absolutely clinch the bargain till I've found out more about her!"

"I don't blame you, and I am sorry that I cannot help you much this time. I share your views entirely!"

"All right!" said John. "I'll let you know as soon as I find out. I say"—looking at his watch and rising hurriedly—"I must get back to Eva! Whatever will she think I've been up to? I want to keep it dark from her!"

Eva drew aside the blind and stepped out, confronting the two men with flashing eyes.

"There is no need to hurry yourself about coming back to me, Mr. Morgan!" she said sarcastically. "As it happens, I have heard a good deal of your interesting conversation! I can quite understand that you wish to keep it dark. I also comprehend your anxiety at the prospect of having a wife with some spirit in her. You men always prefer a woman who will meekly submit to everything and walk about the house like a tame bird, afraid to—to——"

She stopped; her anger would not permit her to continue. She turned to her father and blazed forth at him.

"I never thought that *you*, my dear father, would talk like that about me! Oh, it is too bad!"

"My dear Eva, I——" began Mr. Braxton, his voice betraying the utmost bewilderment.

But Eva turned from him to John Morgan.

"You need make no payment in order to be rid of so undesirable a wife as I should make! Perhaps I have a temper. I will relieve you from the necessity of making inquiries—I *have* a temper. I will release you. There is your ring!" (Taking it off and throwing it at his feet.) "I don't want to see you again; I despise you! Oh, to think that you should both talk about me as if I were a horse or a dog, or——Thin, am I?"

"My dear Eva," expostulated her father, "I was talking about a horse!"

"A—horse?" gasped Eva, brought to her senses by her father's look and his emphatic statement. "What——"

"I was thinking of buying a horse suitable for my wife to ride and I consulted my old friend," declared John coldly. "However, there will be no need to trouble further! I am not likely to marry, for, although I do not object to spirit, I do not relish the notion of being spied on and it would be a sad thing for a woman to marry a man whom she despises and whom she actually thinks could be guilty of such manners as you credit me with! I do not ask for meekness, but I want a fairly gentle disposition. Good afternoon!"

She wanted to hold out her hands to him and ask for forgiveness but her pride held her back till it was too late. He was gone and she had lost her lover.

She waited for him to come again, but he had gone to Australia; he decided to go to the Antipodes in furtherance of his business. She waited for some sign from him after his return, but none came. Then she humbled herself and wrote to him.

"I am obliged for your note," he wrote back, "and I am ready to forgive, but it is difficult to forget. Besides, I have come to the conclusion that I should not run well in double harness."

Miss Eva Braxton burnt the note sorrowfully and registered a vow to remain single.

H. Bramley.

PETER'S PATRON.

Telling of a Rivalry Between Poetry and Love.

Peter Griffin was a poet and poor. This in itself is not a wonderful thing, but Peter was by no means blest in the knowledge that many other followers of the muse were similarly circumstanced.

He had longings—a "soul" some call it. But such sordid details of everyday life as bread and cheese, to say nothing of a little butter upon the bread, perpetually interfered with his inspirations. Even poets must live!

He was not a prig, nor was he conceited. He did not believe that he ought to be Poet Laureate instead of Alfred Austin. In fact, I do not think he envied that personage in the least.

He had written some fairly successful songs, for which he received the usual modest remuneration; he had contributed poems and verses to magazines and newspapers, and in some cases the editors thereof had imitated Oliver Twist, and asked for "more."

He did not affect long hair, nor did he wear a shabby velvet coat. He was just twenty-six, had a berth in the City; but he carefully concealed from his fellow clerks the fact of his poetic capabilities, and was simply an ordinary young man of the day, both in appearance and conversation.

It was a dreary winter evening, and Peter had been "touching up" some new poems before sending them to an editor. He sat in his somewhat dingy bed-sitting room in the suburbs, and dreamt he was famous.

He had been reading, a short while previously, I think it was Walter Besant's "Chaplain of the Fleet," and he mentally compared himself to poor Solomon Stallabrass, the starveling poet in that story.

Why did not rich men and women become patrons of the poetic muse in these times? he wondered.

Was there not one soul in all London who admired the art

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sufficiently to endow the poet with such pecuniary means as would stimulate him to write an epic, instead of having to scribble verses to bring him bread and cheese?

Peter felt in his heart that if such a one would but come forward, be his patron, and free him from dire necessity by making him comparatively independent, he could produce a noble, even a great poem.

But, cramped by uncongenial surroundings, the dull daily routine of an office, and the sheer need of having to write that which was saleable, he had the desire to do greater things without the possibility of doing them.

Such a patron as he dreamt of would not only enable him to write at ease, but would insure to the world a work that should hand the name "Paul Lawrence," Peter's *nom de plume*, down to posterity, and do incalculable good to the cause of art.

His musings were interrupted by the postman's knock. A few moments later the grimy maid of all work brought him a letter. It bore the imprint of the publishers of a magazine to which he had frequently contributed verses of a somewhat higher class than usual.

He tore it open, to find it contained an inclosure, a crested envelope, addressed to him, care of the editor. He opened this and read:

"520, *Eaton Square, S.W.*

"*Lady Anstruther, having greatly admired the poems signed 'Paul Lawrence,' would be glad and honored if their author would kindly call upon her.*"

Peter's heart gave a great thump and then stood still. A patron at last! He rubbed his eyes, and read the letter again. Was it a hoax? No, it could not be; no one who would be likely to play such a joke upon him knew his poetic proclivities.

None of his colleagues at the office, from manager—nay, from principal even—to office boy, knew of his other name and existence.

He looked at his watch. It was Saturday, on which day he cast off the trammels of the City and put on the toga of the poet—only in a metaphorical sense, of course—at two o'clock. It was now six. He would don his best and call upon Lady Anstruther that very evening.

Never in all his six-and-twenty years of life had Peter dressed himself with more care and thought. He discarded tie after tie in his anxiety to look his best. Even when he finally decided which one to wear, he was doubtful whether his first choice was not better taste.

At last he drew on a new pair of gloves and set out, after a lengthened survey of himself in the cheap looking-glass.

To make assurance doubly sure, he stopped on his way at a stationer's, and, referring to a London Directory, found that Lady Anstruther did live at 520, Eaton Square.

It was with a beating heart that he arrived at that house, and summoned up his courage to give a correct rat-tat! with the knocker.

The door was opened by a footman gorgeous in red coat, white stockings, knee breeches and powdered hair. Her ladyship was in, said this being condescendingly, and Peter was ushered in a languid manner into a morning room. He had not waited, with a certain feeling of trepidation, more than two minutes when her ladyship rushed—literally rushed into the room.

She was a short, stout, white-haired lady, of some sixty years, with a benevolent countenance and a gushing manner. She grasped our poet with both hands.

"Welcome!" she cried enthusiastically. "How very good of you to come so soon! But, oh, you do not look in the least like a poet! I feel quite disappointed!"

"I am very sorry!" was all that Peter could stammer out.

"No matter; it is not the man but the mind that we measure."

Poor Peter could not but feel this remark was somewhat unflattering.

"Please be seated, and let me tell you why I so wished to see you. You must know that I am an intense admirer of the muse of poetry. And your poems are so truly beautiful, so high in aim, so perfect in every respect, that I wanted to meet you, to help you, to spur you on to far greater things, to nobler aspirations, to be your—your what is it?"

"Patron," suggested Peter boldly.

"That is the word—your patron; and when you are great and famous—a Byron, a Tennyson, nay, a Shakespeare perhaps, who can say—the world will speak your name and say: 'Louisa Lady Anstruther was his friend, his patron, his discoverer. To her we owe him!'"

Her ladyship paused, partly for effect, and partly from want of breath.

"You are too good!" murmured Peter.

"Not a word. Do not deprecate yourself. By so doing you question my good taste, Mr. Lawrence."

She looked at him so closely and steadily that Peter began to feel a trifle uncomfortable.

"You are good-looking and young. You have the world before you. With my aid and influence it will be at your feet in a few years' time. Tell me about yourself."

Peter told her. She nodded, interpolating "Yes," "Excellent," "Capital," here and there.

"You will leave the City, of course," she said when Peter had finished. "I am glad you have no relatives. I shall of course adopt you. I have no children; you will be my son. I shall make you a handsome allowance to enable you to write in comfort. You will go into Society—the best—with me, and you will commence at once. Now, if you will."

Her volubility took away Peter's breath.

"I shall allow you——" She named a sum beyond his wildest dreams. "You must have a valet. He will teach you how to dress. That tie, for instance, is atrocious! You could not wear that in my house."

Poor Peter!

"Where do you live?"

Peter told her.

"You will dine with me to-night. I have a few friends to whom I shall introduce you. You will drop your own name. I will order the carriage to take you back to your—your home, where you can dress and return here. The carriage will wait for you. We do not dine until nine."

Her enthusiasm bewildered Peter, swept him off his feet. But he contrived to murmur what he meant to be thanks.

Her ladyship rang the bell and ordered the carriage imperiously. When it was announced, she gave him her hand, saying: "*Au revoir*," and, seized by a sudden happy impulse, Peter stooped and kissed it.

"Very pretty!" said her ladyship, to whom all flattery was honey, "but not quite so gracefully done as it could be. However, you will learn. Stay, have you money?"

"Enough," stammered our poet.

"Pay your landlady, or whatever you call the person, out of this."

She handed him a pleasantly plump purse, which Peter was too bewildered to refuse.

Was he dreaming? Was he on his head or his heels? Was he going mad? Peter wondered, as the carriage bore him back to his dingy suburban lodgings. How lucky, thought he, that he possessed a dress suit! Then for the first time since he had read Lady Anstruther's letter he remembered something that he had not spoken of or thought about.

Nellie! Nellie, his simple, humble little sweetheart! Poor Nellie—loving, trusting, tender-hearted, curly-haired Nellie!

Peter's heart gave him a twinge of pain. This would part them for ever. He knew that Nellie and his new patron were as wide apart, socially, as the Poles. Poor Nellie!

Her sweet little face with the soft, pitiful eyes came before him as he packed up his belongings and put on his dress clothes. Already she seemed a part of some other existence he had once led. He must write to her, do something for her, help her—but he could never marry her. To his credit let it be recorded that Peter felt despicably mean.

He tried to dismiss her from his thoughts that evening, driving back to Eaton Square, during dinner, and afterwards. But ever and again her face came before him with tearful,

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reproachful, yet tender eyes, and he was anything but happy.

He got through dinner successfully, being fairly apt, and, though not quite at ease, quick-witted enough not to betray himself. His patron was delighted with her *protégé*. From that night Peter Griffin died and Paul Lawrence took his place.

Was he happy? He did not know—he could not say. The life was a dream of ease and luxury. A study was fitted up for him, with creamy, hand-made notepaper to write upon and an expensive gold-mounted fountain pen to inspire him. Here he sat when not driving or visiting with Lady Anstruther.

But he wrote nothing. New clothes poured in upon him. He was made much of by the ladies, flattered and flirted with. He wrote to Nellie, and now and then in some lovely drawing-room, surrounded by charming women and in an atmosphere of ease and cultured leisure, her sorrowful face would arise, not to reproach him, but to remind him of the time when it had seemed to him the very sweetest in the world.

Poor Nellie! She would forget him in time. He must marry well. His patron said so.

But he wrote nothing. One day he sat down intending to commence a great epic. He sat for an hour without result. He did not write a single line. He could not!

Then the horror of the thing suddenly fastened upon him. Suppose he could not write any more! The blood in his veins tingled at the thought; his hands grew clammy, his head swam giddily. The fear drove him frantic. He turned again to his table and picked up his pen. He wrote furiously, feverishly.

Rubbish—utter silly jingle, with halting metre and not a poetic idea in it!

He threw down his pen and went for a long walk. When on his return, he tried again, the result was the same. Failure! He could not write a line!

Then he realised that the muse had forsaken him. It was no avail to hope the morrow would bring her back. He knew it would not; nor would a hundred to-morrows. He was as certain as that he was living that he would never write again. Poet he was, but now he was an impostor, a fraud, a lie.

His brain throbbed at the thought. The happy, tender ideas and fancies that had thrilled him in his dingy room, here, amid comfort, wealth, and luxury, would not come. And he knew that they never would come, too; knew it without hope of doubt.

His whirling thoughts returned to Nellie. How her tender face and simple, loving ways would have comforted him! But he had cut himself adrift from her for ever by his choice. And this—this was his punishment.

His patron found Paul Lawrence strangely absent at dinner that night.

There was a large and fashionable party, and those who expected something poetic from him must have gone, so far as that was concerned, empty away. It is to be trusted that they consoled themselves with the reflection that poets, of all men, shine least in society.

Lady Anstruther quietly rallied him, and hinted that he was thinking out an epic. Poor Paul! He gave a sickly smile, and made an apology that he did not mean. So soon did he begin to play the hypocrite. But for how long?

Those terse, pregnant words haunted him for long after. For how long could he keep up?

He knew—none better—that he would never write even so much as a quatrain or a rondeau in the lap of luxury, much less the great epic his patron expected of him.

How he bore the next week—fortnight—month, Paul Lawrence never knew. Every day he tried to write—it was a waste of beautiful paper and the best ink money could buy. Yet in his dingy, dirty garret, he could scribble without ceasing, ideas flowed, thoughts came to him, though the paper on which he wrote was bought by the pound, cheaply, and his inkstand was—a penny ink bottle! And his patron!

Ah, that was the point. Even the most complaisant of patrons are anxious to see the results of their patronage.

To Lady Anstruther's surprise, then disappointment, and at the last annoyance, there were no results.

This story is not a tragedy, though to poor Peter it began to assume almost those dimensions. He tried to avoid Lady Anstruther, but he could not. He began to fear she was growing suspicious.

He was not far wrong. And all the while he had to play the liar and the hypocrite, while he knew very well in his heart the lap of luxury was not the place in which to write poems, or, indeed, to do any kind of work worthy of the world for which it is written. He knew his brain was dulled by the artificiality of the life he led. He knew it.

But he thought of Nellie. Where was she? Was she breaking her heart because he, as others had done before him, had chosen luxury rather than love? And she had loved him, with tender eyes, clinging soft hands, and tears of admiration in the former which were a million times more eloquent than all the fulsome praises of his patron's friends.

He thought of Nellie—his old sweetheart. But even thinking of her could not bring him back his lost gift.

One very wet night Lady Anstruther went out to dine without him. He had pleaded that he wanted to "think out" some work; but even then he fancied he saw something like contempt in his patron's eyes. Was he right? he wondered.

True, the poem he had shown her the day before was a poor effort. But—it was the best he could do.

When alone he made no attempt to write. He put on a macintosh and went out. Miserable at heart, through the rainy, miserable streets he went, whither he hardly knew.

It was an absolute relief to be free. He suddenly felt hunger. He went into a restaurant and had a chop from the grill, and he enjoyed it more than a ten course dinner!

He went out, after paying his modest bill, with a queer feeling throbbing at his heart. He looked round him dazedly. The part to which he had wandered seemed strangely familiar. He looked again; he was in the very same suburban street in which he used to meet Nellie! And there she stood, under the gas-lamp—a little white-faced, pathetic figure, with oh, so sad eyes. She ran to meet him with a cry.

"Oh, dear, dear love, I knew you would come back to me!" And the poet could not speak, so he simply took her in his arms under that twinkling, unconscious gas-lamp and kissed her.

How she clung to him, how her soft eyes filled with tears, how she held his hand in her cold fingers!

With a mad impulse her lover—he was that still—tore off his gloves, threw his silk hat into the roadway, where a passing cab promptly converted it into unrecognisability, and took her again into his arms. Ah, there are some things words cannot express.

"Forgive me!" he said.

"What have I to forgive, love?" was all Nellie replied.

Was it all a dream? thought Peter. Yet no! There were his hat and gloves—his patron's gift; he was bareheaded, in the rain, under a gas-lamp, with Nellie's arms about him. Thank God, it was not a dream.

* * * * * * *

That was how Peter never went back again to Eaton Square; how Lady Anstruther had occasion to bemoan the "ingratitude of the poetic temperament," and how Nellie found her lover.

But the world did not lose a poet, because Peter's patron frequently sees and hears the name of Paul Lawrence, though she never speaks of him, nor will ever meet him again.

He is successful, happy, contented; and he has Nellie. And he knows that the poet's patron is not luxury, but—Love.

Clifton Bingham.

"Don't you want to leave footprints on the sands of time?" asked the mentor. "No," answered the young man, who is ambitious but lazy, "I'd rather leave carriage ruts."

He (reading item in newspaper): "It is estimated that in a few thousand years the human race will have become entirely destitute of teeth." She: "And yet you want Tommy to be a dentist."

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CLOSING DATE: AUGUST 27TH.

Letter Juggling Competition.

CASH DOWN. FIRST PRIZE, £25.	CASH DOWN. SECOND PRIZE, £10.	CASH DOWN. THIRD PRIZE, £5.

TWO BILLIARD TABLES *(measuring 4 ft. 10 inches by 2 ft. 8½ inches), together with cues, balls, marking board, and spirit level,*
And **TWENTY-FIVE GRAMOPHONES**, *each one fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, and accompanied by two records.*

• • • • • • •

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find twelve sets of letters, each of which contains the name of a Railway Station in the United Kingdom (not necessarily using all the letters). You must write (in ink), in the space left for that purpose, the longest name you can make by rearranging the letters.

The name containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If, however, more than one such name can be made out of one set of letters, each will be counted correct. Only one name must be written on each line.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January (1903) edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to BRADSHAW'S GUIDE, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or ROOM EIGHT, "SHORT STORIES," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The first prize of £25 will be given to the competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £10 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, take out this page and fasten it to the other eleven lists, in order of date, then post them all in an envelope addressed to The Editor, "SHORT STORIES," Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., so as to arrive not later than by first post on Thursday, August 27th. Put the words "Juggled Letters" on the top left-hand corner of the envelope.

In the event of a tie a further set (or, if necessary, several further sets) of letters will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

TWELFTH LIST.

133. CEEFKLLLORSU	**139. ADDEIIKLNOST** .....
134. ACEFOOPRV	**140. ABCEKLLMNOÓP** .....
135. AACCHIILNRRT	**141. ACEFGHILNO** .....
136. BEGLOOPRSS	**142. ADEGHLORTUY** .....
137. AACILLLMNOR	**143. AAACGHILLNNPR** .....
138. ACIKRWW	**144. ABCEEFNORT** .....

I agree to abide by the Editor's decision in this Competition.

Name..... Address.....

.....

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Powerful New Series.

THE "BRIDGE" OF RUIN.

Being the

CONFESSIONS OF A GIRL GAMBLER.

THE FIRST SIX EPISODES.

Though my real name is not Olive Beresford, I am calling myself that for the purpose of these confessions. An aunt had left me an income of £150 a year, and just as I was wondering how I should occupy my time, I received a letter from Annabel Vernon, an old school-friend, who was now married, to come and spend the week at Vernon Towers.

I was delighted to accept the invitation, and arrived on the Friday evening, being met by Mr. Vernon at the station. The house party consisted of a Mrs. Grainger, Mr. Taskot and Mr. Dean Fisher, who was an expert Bridge player.

After dinner, a Mr. Bainbrig and his sister, near neighbours of the Vernons, arrived, and Bridge was proposed. Miss Bainbrig and I were novices at the game, and Mr. Fisher undertook to teach us how to play, Mr. Taskot making the fourth at our table. We played for a penny a game—at least, that was what I understood penny points to mean—and I congratulated myself that my partner and I were doing very well. The scores were not added up that evening, so I did not know exactly how matters stood.

On the Saturday morning I got up early and went for a walk, during which I met Mr. Taskot, who told me that he had lost heavily the previous night after the ladies had retired.

That same evening we played Bridge again, and when the scores were added up Annabel told me that my losses amounted to £11 7s. 10d.

This sum meant a great deal to me, and I wondered how I was ever to pay it. I made friends with Mr. Taskot, and learnt from him that I was supposed to be an heiress. When I told him how matters really stood he promised to help me.

We met the following morning, Sunday, before breakfast at the spot where we had previously encountered one another. Mr. Taskot told me that I had only been asked to Vernon Towers that my friends, as I thought them, might fleece me. He promised to lend me the £11 7s. 10d., and we fixed upon a code of signals by which we might meet the sharpers on an equal footing.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Grainger, on her way to early service at church, saw us together. I then knew that I should hear more of the meeting.

In the afternoon, while the other members of the party occupied themselves with cards, I went for a walk, during which I was rescued from a mad dog by a Mr. Maurice Ray, who gave vent to an expression almost of surprise when he learnt where I was staying.

On the Monday I sat down to the card-table with delight, looking forward to having my revenge.

EPISODE SEVEN.

Fluctuating Resolutions.

Our scheme worked admirably at first, and I became so excited at winning one game after another, that I was in danger of being too careless in exploiting the code of signals agreed upon. Being now better acquainted with the ramifications of Bridge, I was not misled by apparent success, but paid very particular attention to the honours scores, and knew how the games were really going.

"Our luck is good to-day, eh?" smiled Mr. Taskot. "But that must not tempt us into playing carelessly."

The last word was accompanied by a warning glance which had its intended effect, and I curbed the exuberance of spirit I had begun to show.

The Vernons looked thoroughly mystified, and the growing frown on Annabel's face indicated the vexation of spirit which her unusual losses were occasioning her.

Mr. Fisher was also surprised, for it must have seemed astonishing for his accustomed methods of card manipulation to have no better result than to make his losses greater.

Mrs. Grainger had a headache, she said, and preferred not to play until evening, but I think the true reason of her abstinence was to be found in the fact that she was an invariable loser, and wished to impose some kind of limit to her disbursements.

Harry and Annabel Vernon took turns at making a fourth, and I think nobody but Mr. Taskot and I was sorry when luncheon time put a stop to play for the time being.

On second thoughts, I am not sure I wasn't glad myself, for Mr. Fisher was beginning to make me feel rather uncomfortable by his curious glances. He was watching me very keenly, and, towards the last, I became almost afraid to pursue the tactics which had answered so well up to then.

So, upon the whole, it was just as well that we ceased playing, and I'm sure I enjoyed my lunch all the better for knowing that I was now a good many pounds into pocket. I had not stopped to argue that I had no business to indulge in the scheme of retaliation after I had recouped the losses which I had just cause to resent. It was enough for me that Mr. Taskot considered it quite fair to fight our tricky entertainers with their own weapons.

To tell the truth, the glamour of gambling already had me in its grip, and when, early in the afternoon, there was made a perfunctory suggestion that we should have a game of tennis, I was one of the first to negative it.

"Considering you are such a novice, you have made astonishing havoc with other people's pockets," observed Mr. Fisher, with a benevolent smile, which seemed to indicate that he did not mind having lost a trifle himself. "If ever anybody else wants lessons from me, I think I shall cite you as the most prodigiously clever pupil I have ever coached."

"Thank you," I laughed. "You are pleased to flatter me. But perhaps my luck may change this afternoon."

"A change of partners might easily influence your luck."

I gave an involuntary start of alarm at this remark. Was it possible that Mr. Fisher suspected what was really happening, and that Mr. Taskot's clever code of signals had not proved subtle enough to avoid detection? And, if so, was the remark about a change of partners intended as a hint to that effect?

The idea gave me such a shock that I resolved not to handle another card except in scrupulously fair play, for I had become suddenly alive to the folly and wickedness of what I had

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been persuaded by Mr. Taskot's specious arguments to do. But another glance at Mr. Fisher's guileless face convinced me that my fleeting suspicion was nothing more than the outcome of an accusing conscience, and I breathed freely once more.

Mrs. Grainger found it impossible to resist playing till evening, especially after it transpired that a table had been fixed in the verandah, where we could indulge in our fascinating amusement without losing the benefit of fresh air and sunshine. But Harry Vernon said that he had some business to attend to, and Mr. Fisher announced his intention of devoting a couple of hours to his arrears of correspondence.

This left but four of us for Bridge, and Mr. Taskot, who was to be my partner again, asked me to have a short promenade with him on the terrace until our opponents were ready to play.

"I have something important to say to you," he observed, as soon as we were out of hearing of everybody else. "Do you know, Miss Beresford, that you forfeited a big winning by not giving me the signals in the last game?"

"I know," was my murmured reply. "But we had got our losses back before then, and I was nervous too. I fancied that both Mr. Fisher and Mr. Vernon were suspicious, and dared not go on."

"If that is all, you may rest assured that you were mistaken. I am positive that our secret is safe."

Our secret is safe!

The phrase jarred on me. I had been easily persuaded to do a foolish thing. But I had not contemplated making common cause with a man who would allude to the transaction as "our secret," and my eyes flashed with vexation.

"There is all the more reason then," I said sharply, "that the matter shall go no further. I am sorry I gave any signals at all."

"You will be more sorry, if you do not give a succession of them."

"How so?"

"Well, thereby hangs a tale. I told you before that I had detected the Vernons and Fisher in sharp practice?"

"Yes."

"And I also told you that the only way to fight them was by using 'counter irritants,' as the doctors say. At present, you and I stand to be slightly into pocket, so far as to-day's play is concerned. But, while I was smoking a cigarette on the verandah, just beneath the window of Harry Vernon's own den, I heard him and Mr. Fisher drilling a new scheme of spoliation into Mrs. Vernon, by which our pockets are to be practically turned inside out.

"Now I have an objection to be swindled. I have also an objection to creating a scene, and it will please me to leave here without giving the slightest indication that I have fathomed the rascality which is going on. So I think we had better adopt defensive measures again, and it will be Mrs. Vernon's own fault if her fresh attempt at roguery is a failure. And be sure you still let them think that you are an heiress."

Mr. Taskot's statements made me feel very angry, and, in spite of previous resolutions, I agreed once more to defend myself as he wished, particularly after he hinted at the pleasure it might give me to use my winnings in buying a present for Annabel, which would more than pay for the selfish hospitality that had been tendered to me.

EPISODE EIGHT.

A Thunderbolt.

I sat down to the game in a curious mood. Of course the best way to avoid being fleeced again would have been to refrain from playing. But I was fascinated to such an extent that I could not resist the opportunity of trying my hand at it once more. After this visit was ended, I was not likely to have many chances of playing Bridge again, and I wanted to make the most of what time remained to me for the thrilling pleasure.

Besides, it would do the Vernons good to meet with their match, and I owed them a bitter grudge, not only for what they had done, but for what they intended to do.

Mrs. Grainger was exceedingly pleased to have Annabel for her partner, for the latter was spoken of as a sort of mascot, to whom luck showed himself a staunch attendant, and in whose company, therefore, it was more than probable that former losses would be won back.

Annabel's mood puzzled me a little until I recollected that her taciturnity was probably caused by the close attention she was paying to the new scheme of fleecing into which she had recently been drilled by her husband and Mr. Fisher.

The same idea evidently struck Mr. Taskot, for he smiled meaningly at me, and I nodded back, just to show him that I did not mean to allow myself to be swindled.

For awhile my partner and I had no difficulty in winning, and I looked in vain for the tactics which I had been warned to expect. However, I reflected that we were only being allowed to forge ahead in the game for a couple of small score rubbers to lull our suspicions, and at the first indication of a change of luck, I brought my defensive measures into operation.

Once, when Annabel was dealing, I distinctly saw her slip two cards up her sleeve, while she was pretending to bend down for one that had dropped by design, of course.

"So," I thought, "that is how you manage to have such good trumps, milady! You secure a couple of leading cards, probably both of the same suit, and then you choose your trumps to fit in with the honours cards you have secreted! But what becomes of the surplus cards?"

Very critical observation convinced me of two things. Annabel had not hampered herself with extra cards to get rid of, but had selected a couple while shuffling, and had dealt the rest out so dexterously that only a suspicious observer could detect any sharp practice on her part.

Mr. Taskot had not missed what was going on. But he shot me a warning glance, which I interpreted as a hint not to betray the discovery I had made, and, in necessary self-defence, we both pursued our own little arrangement, confident that neither Annabel nor Mrs. Grainger could guess any ulterior motive in certain gestures by which we told each other what cards we had in our hand.

For instance, if I found it necessary to raise my hand to the right side of my head and toy with the tortoise-shell comb which held some of my hair in due bounds, hearts were the cards of which I had most in stock, and if any of them were honours, I indicated their exact value by the finger which pushed the comb into place.

The thumb meant the ace, the first finger the king, and so on. The left side of my head helped to indicate diamonds. A touch of my neck brooch served for clubs; and spades, the lowest in value, were cleverly served

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by the knot of black velvet which added smartness to my cream lace coffee coat.

Mr. Taskot's code of signals was slightly different. But it was equally unobtrusive and ingenious, and we presently began to win at such a rate that our opponents were "staggered," to quote one of Annabel's favourite verbs.

"Upon my word," grumbled Mrs. Grainger, "I never saw anything like it! Here am I, quite an old stager at cards, yet I lose all the time, no matter with whom I play. Even Mrs. Vernon cannot change my luck! Yet two people of little or no experience with cards, can win all before them! It is absolutely astonishing!"

"It is more than astonishing," was Annabel's venomous comment. "It's *peculiar*, more peculiar than anything I have seen for a long time."

What could she mean by the stress she laid on the adjective? Was it possible that she had noticed what we had been doing, just as we had fathomed her trickeries without much difficulty?

I was frightened at the bare thought, but soon put it aside. It had been easy us to for detect her malpractices because we were on the look-out for them. But she had no reason to suspect that we were prepared to guard our interests in the way we were doing, and, of course, it was peculiar, that, even by cheating, she should have none of her usual luck.

"Don't you think we had better cease playing now?" I asked, after being made quite dizzy with excitement by the reckoning up of the score, which showed me to have won over a hundred pounds during the afternoon.

"Give over now?" sneered Annabel. "You forget that you are the victor, and that it is the privilege of the vanquished to prolong the game."

"All the same, I won't play any more this afternoon," was Mrs. Grainger's decision. "Perhaps my luck will turn, if I break off for a while. I ought to have stuck to my resolve not to play at all till evening."

"I am sure Miss Beresford and I will be happy to give you your revenge whenever you like," said Mr. Taskot, "especially as Mrs. Vernon has been so unusually unlucky. But very likely she will have *all* the winning cards up her sleeve next time, and will leave her antagonists without a rap to bless themselves with."

Annabel turned quite pale at this exceedingly broad rub.

But Mr. Taskot's face looked so innocently pleasant, and so absolutely unconscious of guile, that the keen home thrust was dismissed as an oddly coincidental figure of speech, and the appearance of two maids, who were bringing tea to the verandah, was the signal for putting the cards away for the time being.

I was thankful for this, for though I did not mean to profit by what I was winning, I was extremely uneasy.

"Never mind," I thought, "after I have bought some handsome presents for Mrs. Grainger and Annabel, with the money I have won from them, my conscience will be at ease again. As Mr. Taskot put it, my treacherous hostess will have been hoist by her own petard, and I will take good care never to do any more signalling after I leave Vernon Towers."

Annabel's tea equipage was the daintiest I had ever seen, and she made a charming picture herself as she gracefully handled the Queen Anne teapot.

Mr. Taskot immediately began to carry the cake-stand towards Mrs. Grainger and myself, but was gently called to order by our hostess.

"We can't begin without Mr. Fisher and Harry," she said plaintively. "I do wish they would remember that tea should never be kept waiting a minute."

"Perhaps they are out in the grounds, and did not hear the bell," suggested Mr. Taskot.

But one of the maids corrected this impression by saying: "The master says he will be here directly. He and Mr. Fisher have been taking some snapshots, he says, and are just finishing them off."

A sudden smile illumined Annabel's face, and if there had been anything to be triumphant about, I should almost have fancied it was a smile of triumph. Mr. Taskot saw it, and looked rather puzzled. But in another second the two dilatory gentlemen put in an appearance, and everything proceeded very merrily for the next half hour, when the first faint indications of the coming storm made themselves felt.

"Taskot," said Mr. Fisher, taking out his cigarette case, "can you spare me a few minutes of your valuable time? I have a fancy for strolling in the shrubbery while you and I have a smoke together. I'm sure the ladies will excuse us."

As a matter of fact, no excuse was necessary, for Mrs. Grainger was already going up to her own room, and Annabel, smiling her very sweetest, asked me to go with her to Harry's den, to see what success his photographic experiments had met with.

"Do come and have a look at them, there's a dear," she said. "Harry is really very good at that sort of thing, and you'd be surprised at the lovely pictures he turns out sometimes, although he is only an amateur."

Could anybody believe that card-playing had cast such a glamour over me that I was losing all interest for everything else? Yet it certainly was the case, and I had no inclination to see the results of anyone's amateurish efforts, for I had been victimised in the past by a girl friend who had "artistic leanings," and I had no reason to suppose, notwithstanding Annabel's eulogy, that Mr. Vernon was cleverer than most other amateurs.

But if I had only guessed the real motive which induced the Vernons to ask me to visit "Harry's den," I should have run upstairs, snatched my hat and gloves, and left Vernon Towers in a panic, reckless of what was to happen afterwards!

"Sit down here, there's a darling. You'll be nice and comfy in that chair, and you'll have all the better opinion of Harry's genius. Point of view is everything, isn't it?"

I agreed that it certainly must make a difference, and then resigned myself to the infliction of having to give perfunctory praise to a long series of hideous sun pictures.

Nor was my expectation belied. For fully three-quarters of an hour I was shown all sorts of rubbishy efforts, until I became so bored that I could no longer even pretend to be interested.

"But these are all old things, are they not?" I asked at last, being anxious to put an end to the mild martyrdom I was enduring. "Suppose you show me what has been done to-day?"

"My dear Olive, great things have been done to-day," replied Annabel, whose husband seemed to be intently watching for somebody. "For instance, Mr. Fisher and Mr. Taskot have just been having a talk which will prove of the utmost importance to us."

"I see them coming back from the shrubbery," interrupted Mr. Vernon. "Annabel, Miss Beresford shall see my latest effort now."

It suddenly occurred to me that, for some obscure reason or other, my hosts had been trifling my time away, and that

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they were now going to disclose their real object in inviting me hither.

"Have they been waiting till the two gentlemen had finished their talk?" I was thinking when, following the direction of Harry Vernon's gaze, I distinctly saw Mr. Fisher nod his head vigorously. I also saw that Mr. Taskot was livid with rage, and I tasted a faint foreboding of coming disaster when Annabel thrust a Kodak film into my hands, and exclaimed loudly: "Yes, my dear, you shall agree that great things have been done to-day. What do you think of that?"

Great Heavens! Shall I ever forget the shock which that photograph gave me! Or the sickening dread with which I listened to Annabel's mocking words. "Lovely, isn't it? Did you ever see anything more realistic? Nobody would imagine that you were not posing for effect, would they?"

Annabel's words, and the deadly meaning that underlay them, seemed to strike me dumb, and I could do nothing but gaze in growing horror at the frightful evidences of my own folly, which she took a positively fiendish delight in forcing upon my shuddering notice.

While Mr. Taskot and I thought ourselves absolutely safe from observation, and while we thought Mr. Vernon and Mr. Fisher were nowhere within sight of us, they had occupied themselves in taking innumerable snapshots of us and our doings, with the result that every signal my partner and I had made was faithfully reproduced on the tell-tale films, and I knew only too well that I was entrapped, without hope of mercy, by people whose business it was to live on what they extorted from others!

"A case of diamond cut diamond, eh?" sneered Annabel. "Miss Beresford chose to come here and pretend almost idyllic innocence of the ways of the world, so that we might not guess of what double-dyed deceit she was capable. She wanted to cheat us out of our money, and to laugh in her sleeve at our simplicity. But she has met with more than her match, I fancy."

My distress and terror were by this time so great that I rose from my chair with a frantic gesture.

"Let me go!" I cried. "Let me go! I will explain everything afterwards."

"After you and Mr. Taskot have abused our hospitality by inventing another code of swindling signals?" returned Mr. Vernon. "No, thank you, Miss Beresford, I have a better plan than that in view. You are absolutely in our power now, and if you wish to avoid ruin and disgrace, you will do exactly what I am now going to dictate to you."

(What his terms were will be told next week.)

TITLED DECOY.

"Express" Correspondent.

MILAN, Sunday, Aug. 2.

The police have arrested a gang of professional gamblers. A genuine countess, Sacchi, acted as decoy. Having access to the best society, she easily persuaded persons to visit her at her splendid villa near Milan. There, the visitors were made drunk, and invited to play cards. It is said that many Americans are among the victims.

The above extract from the DAILY EXPRESS *will be of exceptional interest to the readers of our "Bridge of Ruin" series.*

"WELL, Mollie," said her papa, who is a Volunteer captain, "did you see me marching through the town to-night?" "Yeth," said Mollie, "and I was very angry, papa. They might have let you have a drum to play on like those others had."

Your Editor Chats.

THE last list of letters in the Juggled Letters Competition will be found on page 239. All attempts must reach this office not later than by first post on Thursday, August 27th, addressed to the Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. The words "Juggled Letters" must be written in the top left-hand corner of the envelope. The attempts of competitors who do not address their envelopes correctly are liable to be disqualified.

A NEW competition will start in a few weeks. Valuable money prizes will be offered in addition to Gramophones and two of Messrs. J. R. Mally and Co.'s famous Billiard Tables, complete with cues, balls, marking board, and spirit level. With each Gramophone, too, are given away two records.

WITH the help of the summaries of the new serial and new series, published on the first page and page 240 respectively, any of you who have not already started to read these stories can do so now without missing anything of importance which has transpired in the two instalments that have already appeared.

This week's instalment of "THE 'BRIDGE' OF RUIN" is startlingly dramatic, telling how the code of signals arranged between Mr. Taskot and Olive Beresford is discovered and the results that follow this discovery, leading to the further enmeshing of the Girl Gambler in the toils of her so-called friends.

THE denial of some little luxury in the shape of sweets, or scent, or tobacco for just one week would not be a very great hardship. This is what I ask you to do and then send what you would have spent to the FRESH AIR FUND, to help to give some poor little slum mites that longed-for day in the country to which they have been eagerly looking forward all the year.

Most of you have more than one bright spot in the whole year, but a day in the country through the FRESH AIR FUND is the only bright spot in many little children's year, so I hope you will all respond liberally to this appeal. All amounts, which will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*, should be sent to the Hon. Sec., FRESH AIR FUND, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Send what you can at once, otherwise the spending of the money will have to be deferred until next year.

Your Editor.

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THREE OF A KIND.

The Love Story of an Old Maid and rier Two Nieces.

"I do wonder," said Miss Polly Whittle suspending her knitting and sending an indignant gaze across the street where a young lady, dressed in the cloudiest of white muslins and the bluest of blue ribbons, was being helped into a carriage by a young gentleman—"I do wonder what's the sense of a woman getting married, and making a slave of herself, when she might be comfortable and independent.

"There's that Jenks girl"—indicating the young lady before mentioned. "She had everything she wanted at home, and her father was worried if she scratched her little finger. She could dress as she liked, go where she liked, and do what she liked. And here she must up and marry that ridiculous snip of a clerk, who earns three hundred a year.

"Of all the foolishness! I wonder where she'll get her ribbons and her scent? It's an example of blindness and perversity, and I hope you girls will take warning."

But for Miss Polly's last remark one might have supposed she was alone in her shady drawing-room that afternoon. It would have been a mistake.

Her niece Jane, a tall, demure-looking young lady of twenty-five, sat at the table, dotting an embroidery pattern. Her niece Mollie, a curly-headed damsel of seventeen, sat in the open window, swinging the sprays of wisteria abstractedly, and watching the couple who had excited Miss Whittle's indignation with envious eyes.

It was a little, old-fashioned room, with a high, gilded looking-glass, a few quaint pictures, claw-footed chairs, spare curtains, and a great vase of syringa on the mantel.

Miss Polly, a woman of forty-five, looked quite as old-fashioned, as she sat knitting vigorously in her white cuffs and black silk apron.

"I hope," continued Miss Polly, after waiting a reasonable time and receiving no response to her former remark, "I shall never see either of my nieces making a fool of herself."

"No, certainly, aunt," said Jane.

"Oh, no!" echoed Mollie, from the window.

"As I have always said, I want to save you from the misfortune of the sex. I want you to keep what health and happiness you have, and not slave yourself to death for other people."

"Yes," was the subdued response of the two listeners.

"I see you understand me. Why, Mollie, there comes Mr. Wilkins home to supper, and there's no fire made! Run, child—oh, stop a minute—I forgot to say that I am going out to tea to-morrow night, Mr. Wilkins and I, to Mrs. Green's. She's been talking about having a tea-party for two years, and now it's coming off. We're to go at three and stay till nine."

Mollie whirled about suddenly in the doorway, and there was a peculiar expression in Jane's grey eyes as she raised them to her aunt's face.

"Shall you stay so late?" she asked.

"I mean to, if I'm well. I don't go merely to get my supper; I go for the sake of social intercourse. What are you waiting for, Mollie?"

"Nothing," responded that damsel, dancing on with sudden light-heartedness. "Supper in fifteen minutes, auntie."

I hate explanations, so I will only say that Miss Polly was a maiden lady with two orphan nieces and Mr. Wilkins was an elderly gentleman boarding with Miss Whittle for the summer.

He was a tall, spare man, a widower, with stiff, grey hair, and a curiously puckered face, which wore a feeble smile.

He always wore most amazingly stiff shirt collars and squeaky boots, and his conversation was a hopeless search for terms that should sufficiently praise Miss Polly. Perhaps this was the reason that the latter endured him with such wonderful patience, and reproved Jane and Mollie very severely for laughing at his personal peculiarities.

If any one had been looking for Miss Jane Saunders immediately after breakfast the next morning, they would have found her in her chamber hastily scribbling a letter.

Of course we cannot make her correspondence public, so we will merely watch while she puts the letter in her pocket, dons hat and jacket, and starts for the village, walking gravely and innocently, as if that pocket were empty.

After doing one or two small errands she goes into the post office. The letter is directed to Mr. Herbert Ellis. The postmistress smiles a little as she sees the name, and Jane turns away with flushed cheeks.

Mollie was out at the gate, as pretty as the morning, ostensibly occupied in breaking dead branches off the rose bushes, with a reckless disregard for thorns.

"Why, where are your scissors and gloves?" inquired Jane.

"I don't want them," said Mollie, hastily. "I can work as well this way. Isn't there a prayer-meeting to-night?"

"Yes," replied her sister, feeling her cheeks grow hot again.

"You're going, I suppose?" questioned Mollie, very busy with the rose bushes.

"I think so, if you're not afraid to stay here alone."

"No, indeed!" was the quick answer, delivered with unnecessary earnestness. "Don't think of staying on my account."

"Very well."

The instant Jane was out of sight, Mollie, looking suspiciously at the front of the house, that looked back at her meekly with closed blinds, after peering down into the recesses of the garden on her right, called in suppressed tones to an Irish child on the street, "Mick!"

"Yis'm!"

"Going past Mr. Bent's shop?"

"Yis'm."

"Give this note to Mr. Hall—remember, to Mr. Hall. If you'll be back in ten minutes, and won't tell anybody, I'll give you the biggest piece of cake you ever had! Will you?"

"Yis'm."

Mollie listened to the patter of his bare feet with a satisfied smile, and went on trimming the rose bushes demurely.

Mick, returning in precisely seven minutes, was duly rewarded with an immense slice of cake, duly cautioned never,

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never to tell and dismissed well content. Then Mollie opened the note; for, like all communications written by females, her note required an answer.

Dearest Mollie—*I will be with you to-night at precisely half-past seven. I'm inclined to bless both my stars and the dragon.*

Tom.

At three o'clock that afternoon Miss Polly came into the drawing-room, where her nieces were sitting demurely, cutting bits of bright silk for appliqué work. She wore a lace cap, tied with yellow ribbons, and a green silk dress. Let the reader not be shocked, for Miss Polly was fond of bright colours and went to tea-parties seldom.

"Don't sit up for me," she said patronisingly, regarding herself in the glass with great complacency. "I shall take a key, and we can let ourselves in. Does my dress fit well, Jane?"

"Very well, aunt."

"What flowers shall I carry? London pride is pretty, and sweet-williams—don't you think so?"

"I think other flowers will do better. I'll go and cut you some," said Jane dutifully.

"No; sit still. I hear Mr. Wilkins on the stairs. I'll pick some myself as I go out."

You might have heard Mr. Wilkins at the other end of the town, such stiff boots had he seen fit to assume on this occasion. It was quite a wonderful thing to watch him as he stood in the little path, awkwardly holding the bouquet of pinks and coreopsis Miss Polly had given him, remarking every other minute that "the — hum — the flowers were—hum—excessively pretty," and finally offering his arm laboriously.

"Does my dress fit well, Jane?" she said, regarding herself in the glass with great complacency.

The two girls turned away from the window without comment, only there was a good deal of wonder in Jane's eyes, and a good deal of fun in Mollie's. They sewed industriously the rest of the afternoon, scarcely speaking to each other, until the clock struck five, and Jane went out to get tea ready.

"What a beautiful sunset!" said Mollie, as she rose from the table. "How long does the meeting last, Jane?"

"Until half-past eight; but I may not be home then, for I'm going to carry old Mrs. Davis some medicine. Don't sit up for me. You can leave the back door open, or I'll take the key of the front one. I shall be back before auntie," she added guiltily, seeing Mollie's surprised face.

"You'd better take the key. I think I'll go to bed early. Don't come into my room, and disturb me, Jane. I never sleep well if I am waked."

As Mollie put the last dish comfortably away in the cupboard she heard the clock strike seven, and saw Jane passing out of the gate basket in hand. She felt guilty. How good Jane was, and what a difference between them! Jane was going to do good, and attend a prayer meeting, and she was going to disobey her aunt, stay at home and see Tom. But, somehow, Mollie thought the prospect pleasant.

At half-past seven she was down by the gate. She had little time for anticipation, for somebody sprang through the gate or over it, and greeted Mollie with the freedom of an old acquaintance. It was a merry-faced young gentleman, with blue eyes and brown curls.

"My respects to the dragon," said the new-comer, bowing to the house with great deference. "My respects to Wilkins and your unfortunate sister. How am I blessed with the opportunity of seeing you?"

"Auntie and Mr. Wilkins are at a tea-party, and Jane's gone to a prayer-meeting. Hurry, Tom! Come down in the garden, or somebody will see you. I've locked up the house. You can stay till just half-past eight."

"One hour! Momentarily expecting that the dragon will fall upon me! I don't care if she does!"

"Stop calling her a dragon, Tom, and don't talk so, if you have any pity for me."

"Quite tragic! Excuse me for saying so, Mollie, but how ridiculous all this is! Here we have been engaged a year, and you frown if I bow to you in the street; you scarcely let me show my head near the house, and you won't hear of my speaking to your aunt.

"If I walk past here I discover Miss Polly glaring out of the window, or Wilkins squinting out of the front door. If I look at you twice in church I'm the object of Miss Polly's furious attention. Now, I say it's ridiculous! I'm not a Gorgon—I'm a respectable young man—at least, I always thought so. If you don't think I'm competent to arrange matters, can't you go and tell your aunt you want to get married?"

"You know I would if I dared, Tom, but aunt is dreadful. I try sometimes, but I can't; really, I can't."

"What's to prevent? Will she put an end to your existence, or shut you up and feed you on bread and water?"

"She'd disown me, Tom. She'd cut me off without a shilling, and never have my name spoken again."

"Is that all? I'll own you, and I'll give you twenty shillings for every one she won't give you, besides bestowing my name upon you. Come, that's an offer!"

I will not give the conversation in detail. Suffice it to say that it was just nine o'clock when Mr. Hall, having exhausted

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all his arguments without effect, finally became indignant and determined to depart.

He was making one final appeal to Mollie, who, still lacking in courage, sat sobbing on the seat before him, when they both heard the gate close softly, and saw dimly two figures turning towards the garden.

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Mollie, in terrified accents. "Tom, the pear-trees!"

Before Tom quite knew what he was about, he had followed Mollie, or had been dragged by her, under the shadow of the trees, behind a flourishing clump of lilacs.

The voices were very near them now, and a moment after another miserable couple seated themselves on the same seat which the concealed pair had left so unceremoniously.

"Poor little Mollie," said Jane mournfully, glancing back at the dark house. "She has gone to bed long ago, I daresay; I wish I was as happy as Mollie! Oh, what would she think of me if she knew?"

"Think?" replied the voice of Mr. Herbert Ellis. "I own it wouldn't be very agreeable to be discovered lurking about the house in this fashion, but if you will allow me to go to your aunt to-morrow morning, and tell her I want to marry you, she could think or say nothing unpleasant. You are sacrificing your happiness and mine to a miserable caprice. Your aunt happens to have a prejudice against marriage, and so you promise to remain single until she dies."

"Oh, don't speak so! I owe aunt Polly everything, and her death will be the greatest misfortune in the world to me."

'Well, then, consider me a little, let me come here to-morrow and speak to her plainly."

"Oh, I dare not! Oh, Herbert, what shall I do? There she comes now!"

In fact, two more figures were discernible coming through the gate, unmistakably the figures of Miss Polly and Mr. Wilkins. They seemed in no hurry to go in, but stood leaning on the fence in the moonlight and talking. Presently—disastrous movement!—they were seen sauntering slowly towards the garden.

"What shall I do?" gasped Jane, in the extremity of terror.

"Come under the shade," said Mr. Ellis. "She won't see us."

In a moment they were so near their fellow-sufferers that Mr. Hall could have touched Mr. Ellis's coat-tails.

"The moon is delightful!" was the first remark of Miss Polly's that reached their ears.

"It is!" responded Mr. Wilkins. "Hum—it is. Enchanting."

"I love to walk by moonlight."

"It makes me quite—hum—sad—lonely."

"Ah!" said Miss Polly, sympathisingly.

"I—hum—feel as if I hadn't a friend in the—hum—the world."

"That's strange"—Miss Polly stooped to gather a rose—"when you have so many."

"You are—hum—mistaken. Hum—I haven't one."

"I'm sure I'm your friend, Mr. Wilkins!" said Miss Polly, speaking lower and putting the rose before her face.

Mr. Wilkins became bewildered in a desert of "hums."

"He—hum—hum—he wished she would—hum—uh—he wished he could—hum—believe it."

"I should think you might," rejoined Miss Polly, "when I say it. I suppose the thought of your past happiness is rather trying?" she continued.

"Hum—no. I—hum—could be—hum—happier than I—hum—ever was."

"Indeed!"

"I—hum—assure you. If—if—you—hum—thought so."

"Don't!" exclaimed Miss Polly. "Remember—think of Mrs. Wilkins dead and gone."

Mr. Wilkins was so abashed by this outburst that he said absolutely nothing for five minutes. Miss Polly got out of patience.

"You weren't congenial," she said. "I see. Ah, that is trying!"

Mr. Wilkins was betrayed again, and declared he—hum—never knew what—hum—congeniality was till—hum—till lately. Would she—hum—hum—let him say so?

"Don't speak to me!" exclaimed Miss Polly, sinking down on the much-enduring bench. "I am a disgrace to myself! Oh, if those girls should hear this, what would they say?"

Those girls! Such a shout of laughter behind her! It frightened Miss Polly and Mr. Wilkins nearly into fits. When they recovered a little there was Tom and Mollie on one side, Jane and Mr. Ellis on the other, the last two looking very surprised.

Mollie's arms were about her aunt's neck, and she was crying.

"We'll say you're the dearest auntie in the world! Be good now."

"Be magnanimous," put in Tom. "You see, we've all found each other out."

"And are all equally culpable," rejoined Mr. Ellis.

"And, oh, auntie, say that you don't mind in the least bit, and we'll all be so very happy," put in Jane, who had suddenly recovered her tongue.

Miss Polly Whittles was a wise woman. I shouldn't have written about her if she hadn't been. And when she saw that Fate favoured her, she did not try to thwart it.

Then the six of them all trooped into the house, and although the hour was somewhat late in Miss Polly's estimation they held a hurried consultation, and half-an-hour later tender farewells might have been witnessed in different parts of the garden.

Acute Miss Polly! So it happened that three weddings took place in one day.

A. L. Andrews.

"Oh, Herbert, what shall I do? There she comes now!"

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Splendid Serial Story.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life. By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

FORTIETH CHAPTER.

Agnes Has Her Innings.

For an instant there was a sudden hush in the library.

Gilbert Chase took a step back in startled hesitation, undecided whether to wait until the voice spoke again, or to ask Lady Maitland the strange question that had been flung almost as a challenge into his mouth.

Agnes pushed open the door and came into the room. Her face was malicious and spiteful, as she looked at the tall woman who had hitherto treated her with mocking sarcasm and ridicule.

Now her turn had come, and she was glad that she had so carefully treasured the scrap of paper she had rescued from the dog that morning some months ago.

She had remembered the few words that had been written on it, and as her suspicions had grown more bitter against her father's lovely wife, she had been on the watch for any link that might bring a clue in its wake as to the real owner of the ambiguous message.

She had followed her stepmother from the hall to the library, and listened to the opening words of the conversation between her and the detective with a sullen rage, as she now realised that the man whom she had counted upon as a substitute for the more desirable Heriot North had been spirited away by the woman she hated with all the strength of which her puny soul was capable.

The moment the detective had mentioned the name "Vernon Grant" in connection with that of a released convict, the whole of the enigma was made plain to her in one flash, and she had cried out with a mad impulse to see the woman she hated humbled, and a convicted bigamist.

But Agnes Maitland was not acquainted with the strange nature of the woman who, in moments of great stress, seemed to collect all her energies and resources to the undoing of her foes.

Lady Maitland smiled slightly, and turned to the detective, who stood irresolute in the presence of such perfect command and beauty.

"Well, Mr. Chase," she began, in musical tones. "You heard the request of my step-daughter. Will you do as she advised, or defer your strange questionings until a more convenient time. I am anxious to get back to Sir Trevor."

Agnes interrupted sharply. "Ask her now; she will be sure to do something that will secure her from further questioning. I know her, and have long suspected her of—of concealing a secret!"

Gilbert Chase looked from the acidulated specimen of humanity to the stately woman whose beauty seemed to put a barrier between herself and other people, and, for the moment, he felt a twinge of pity pass through him that she should be treated as a peg for suspicions in her own house. Then he pulled himself together with a jerk, as he remembered how for many years—supposing his doubts correct—this woman had imposed upon Sir Trevor Maitland with impunity, and his heart hardened as he said curtly:

"Excuse me, miss; I must ask you not to interfere with my conversation with her ladyship. I think she understands that it is no idle question that I have put to her." Then turning once more to the calm, self-possessed woman standing with one white hand toying with the chain that fell to her waist, he said:

"Your ladyship will, I know, pardon my persistency, but I asked you a question. It was, 'Can you tell me anything about a photo,' the image of yourself, left with the landlady of a house in Ennismore Gardens, London, who informed me that it had been given her by the owner of the photo, Mrs. Margaret Grant, the wife of the felon, Vernon Grant?"

A slight smile played across the curved lips of Sir Trevor Maitland's wife, a smile of mingled sadness and mockery. She had regained the mastery of herself, after that first wild moment of almost self-betrayal. She had never calculated upon her secret being stumbled upon by the detective engaged upon the unravelling of the murder of the man in the spinny.

It had never occurred to her that once her blackmailer's lips were sealed, her guilty past would not be buried in the oblivion for which she had plotted. Digby Scarlett and Heriot North would reveal it to no one; she felt convinced of that, in spite of her enemy having betrayed her to the man who had believed in her. That had been a splash of jealous rage, not of malice aforethought.

She roused herself with a start, and when she spoke her voice was low and musical as usual.

"I was at first inclined to resent your impertinence, Mr. Chase; but on second thoughts it is ridiculous to be annoyed at what is obviously one of the tricks of your trade, just as scratching is the peculiarity of the cat! To spy and to scratch are unpleasant processes, but occasionally useful. But at the same time I am rather sorry that you have wasted so much good time on the unfortunate past that belongs to the dead!"

Gilbert Chase looked at her sharply. Her well-bred snub had a little damped his assurance while it nettled his temper.

"The dead! On which side, your ladyship?" he remarked drily. "The wife of 'Vernon Grant' is among the living, now; and—so is he!"

Lady Maitland breathed a trifle more quickly for a second, then replied slowly:

"I know nothing about the man, Mr. Chase. I refer to my sister!"

"Your sister!" exclaimed the detective and Agnes Maitland with one voice. "What do you mean?"

She raised her brows. "Surely you did not commit the absurd error of imagining that I was that woman? I hardly like raking up a sad family skeleton; but the wife of that man of whom you spoke was"—she paused slightly, as though her tongue had suddenly twisted over the words she was uttering—"was my twin sister! The scrap of paper to which my clever stepdaughter refers is quite correct. I was informed that my brother-in-law was dead!"

She rose slowly, apparently oblivious of the livid expression on Agnes Maitland's face, and the blank astonishment depicted on that of the detective.

"I have satisfied you, I hope, Mr. Chase?" she smiled. "Is there anything else you would like to know?"

Gilbert Chase put his hand in his pocket mechanically, and drew out a pocket-book which he fingered with thoughtful care. He was so taken aback by the story the cold, even voice of Sir Trevor Maitland's wife had unfolded with such an air of confidence, that he almost regretted his precipitancy in not having considered such a like solution, before exposing himself to the enmity of so haughty a woman as he knew her ladyship to be.

But when he spoke his voice revealed nothing of the thoughts within him.

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

"Your statement is absolutely convincing, your ladyship," he began slowly, "with the exception of one little detail that had just slipped my mind. Can you tell me whether—your sister had a child or not?"

She opened her lips to give the answer that quivered on them, then paused in time. How much did this creature with the inscrutable eyes know of the past, she wondered? It were better not to commit herself by an unwise admission.

"I am not sure," she said at last. "Why do you ask?"

He smiled, and looked at her with a sudden gleam in his eyes. "Because it will interest your ladyship to learn that you have a beautiful *niece* somewhere in the world, waiting to be received by her long-lost *aunt*. She would now be about eighteen, I should fancy. Mrs. Philpott tells me she was christened 'Dolores'!"

A faint shadow flickered into the eyes of Sir Trevor's wife, but she returned the gaze of the detective with calm assurance.

"That is very interesting, Mr. Chase! I only trust that one day chance may bring her to my house! Now perhaps you will excuse me. I have matters of more importance to attend to than the mere indulgence of idle gossip. For, after all," she said with a sneer on her beautiful lips, "that is what your 'important few words' has dwindled into."

With a cold inclination of her stately head, she left the room, leaving Gilbert Chase with the unpleasant impression of having been worsted in a battle of wits by a woman whom he had hoped to dumfound by his knowledge.

He gazed after her admiringly.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he muttered. "She's got a nerve of cast iron! A regular 'flyer,' that's what she is, in spite of nearly giving herself away at first! I shall wait before I tackle her ladyship again!"

A rasping laugh startled him from his reverie. He turned sharply, to see Agnes Maitland looking at him with a mocking sneer on her hard, vicious mouth.

"So," she said, her voice trembling with rage; "you have let that woman go! You have been led from your sense of duty by a pair of violet eyes and a dimpled chin! You are as bad as those other fools, Digby Scarlett, Heriot North and Ernest Heath! They know something, and it suited them not to tell.

"I know that Scarlett and she play into each other's hands for some reason; and as for Heriot North, I heard him myself telling her that he would 'keep faith with her, and that nothing would make him betray the bond between them—not even death'; and now"—she laughed shrilly—"his words have come true, for death has sealed his lips! She is safe so far as he is concerned, for the fire at the 'Hollies' has burnt one of the men who knew something!"

Gilbert Chase bit his lips. It was true that that morning he had heard something of the fire and that several lives had been lost, and he had wished regretfully that he had made sure of his man while there was yet a chance.

The angry, abandoned words of Agnes Maitland, although he credited her with more imagination than truth, caused a sensation of uneasiness in him, making him curt and snappy.

"My dear madam, it is impossible to do more than ask questions at first. Suspicions must be proved before the liberty of anyone can be interfered with. At present I am biding my time; you don't know everything."

Again the lean, spiteful woman laughed, bringing a flush to the pale face of the detective.

"How much do you think I know? Has it ever occurred to you to come to me and find out? Had you done so, you would probably have made a name for yourself among your associates in Scotland Yard, instead of wasting your time over the finding of Ivy Strange!"

Gilbert Chase took a step towards her. "Don't imagine, miss," he said slowly, "that it is waste of time to find Ivy Strange! In spite of your unflattering opinion of my capabilities, I know what I'm about!"

The cruel, watery eyes narrowed to the shutting-out of their pale grey colour, as Agnes leant forward and with a voice oddly tense and impressive, whispered:

"Notwithstanding your cleverness, Mr. Chase, you do not seem to be aware of the fact that her ladyship was on terms of strange intimacy with the dead convict for whose murder you are hounding that meek-and-mild girl, Ivy Strange—the charity child! Ask her ladyship what she had in common with the low tramp whom she could only meet at midnight, and then——"

"Then what?" said the detective, his eyelids twitching nervously.

Agnes opened the door, looked out into the hall, and closed it again. Then turning once more to the impatient man, she said slowly: "I will tell you! Listen!"

Some twenty minutes later, Gilbert Chase left the Manor. His steps were those of a man impelled at intervals by spurts of sudden thought, and slow, irregular strides. His face was pale, and his eyes shone with some emotion his iron will only kept down.

He drew his hand across his brow. It was wet, though the air was keen.

"Gilbert, old man," he muttered. "A regard for the niceties of the English language prevents me from expressing myself with the full and eloquent oratory of which I feel possessed. But you are learning, my boy, and the worst of it is that your teacher is no chief of criminal investigation, but a soured, jealous old maid in a village! I have stumbled all along the line, it seems. I have begun to devote too much attention to Digby Scarlett after our last encounter, and let the lesser threads go by, but now"—and he drew a deep breath—"I'm beginning to see the light!"

FORTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

"The Power of Love."

Jack Maitland had been wandering round the streets of London, seeking vainly for his sweetheart. He meant to find her first, and convince himself that she was well and still loved him, then—and not till then—he would look for the man who had so cruelly disabled him.

A very shrewd guess was concerned with the name of Digby Scarlett, and yet had not Gilbert Chase told him that the master of the "Rest" had returned to the Manor after a fruitless search for him? But in spite of that, he could not get away from the idea that it was not the hand of a poacher on his father's estate that had shot him.

As for the charge against Ivy, he had laughed at it, secure in the conviction of his own intimate knowledge concerning her tender and gentle nature, that was far too sensitive to take the life of a human creature.

One morning, about three days after he had left the Manor, as he was turning over the pages of the *Express*, while idling at the breakfast-table at the Orient Club, he chanced to glance at the column devoted to personal correspondence, such as appointments and greetings between lovers. As his eyes wandered down the list he suddenly sat up straight and breathed quickly, this time looking keenly at the paragraph that had roused him from his moody thoughts—

"Nurse Beaumont has news for her late patient, J. M. She will be at Waterloo Station at six o'clock every evening for half an hour in the First Class General Waiting Room."

"Nurse Beaumont! Nurse Beaumont!" he muttered. "It must be the same kindly woman who nursed me. I remember now her telling me that I was to get well for Ivy's sake; she bucked me up just when I was losing interest in everything, and longed for death. Anyway, even if I am wrong, it will do no harm to go and give a look in the waiting-room at Waterloo. And somehow I feel that I shall see my old nurse!"

The hours dragged by until, at a quarter to six, he hailed a hansom and was soon on his way to Waterloo Station, a strange excitement that increased with each pulse of his being, telling him that he was to learn something that would either

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bring him to the side of the girl he loved, or place a barrier between them for all time.

He went to the first-class general waiting-room at once, but it was empty with the exception of a few men reading newspapers. He sat down and watched the door with eager eyes.

At a quarter past six he rose with a sense of disappointment and a tired look in his face. He had wasted a day for nothing, and was twenty-four hours further from his heart's desire.

As he strolled towards the door, a woman hurriedly entered, and looked back quickly at the man who had passed her with his eyes moodily cast on the ground. She caught her breath and hurried after him, her face quivering with suppressed emotion.

"Mr. Jack!" she cried, touching him on the elbow. "At last, sir, at last, sir! Thank God!"

He wheeled round quickly, his eyes alight with relief and surprise. He caught her hand in his with a nervous grip.

"I was afraid you would not come, or that I had made a mistake!" he said huskily. "Another moment and we would have missed! Tell me," he went on rapidly, eyeing her with burning eyes, "is—is she in London? Have you bad news for me? Your advertisement said you had. It cannot be that she is—married after all?"

Nurse Beaumont shook her head, a faint smile curving her kindly mouth at the impatience of her late charge.

"No, sir," she said quickly, "she is not married, and she is in London. The news I have for you is not bad, but——"

"But what?" he cried tearfully. "Oh, nurse, be quick, and put me out of my torture at once, or I shall go mad!"

"You heard, I suppose, sir, that Miss—our young lady," she said hastily, leaving out the name of the girl, "is hiding away from those that want to say she committed a cruel murder?"

He nodded impatiently. "Of course I have! All that rot was told me at once, but I never gave it a thought, except to laugh at the idea of her being anything but the best and dearest girl in the world, in spite of their telling me that the wretched tramp was her father!"

A gleam of excitement shone in Nurse Beaumont's eyes.

"I am glad to hear you say that, sir," she answered, "for now I can take you to her with a clean conscience, seeing that you believe none of these things that are being spread against my poor, sweet young lady."

Jack laughed for sheer joy. "Hurry up, nurse! What is it to be—a hansom, a motor-car, or an air-ship? Anything that will take me to her the soonest!"

"Then a train will be the best and safest, sir," said Nurse Beaumont, utterly innocent of any irony in her words, and wondering at the sudden laugh that came from the lips of the boy who had lain so near death only a few short weeks ago.

Jack took the tickets to Surbiton, and as they drew nearer their destination the smile left his lips, and his eyes became anxious, while a red spot of excitement flamed on either cheek. They took a cab at the station, and presently were outside the house where for so long his sweetheart had hidden from the law that demanded her liberty.

A cold sweat broke out on the boy's face, and he clutched the arm of the woman who had brought him to the girl he loved.

"Tell me—what is she doing in this house? She had no money, and this is the residence of a man with plenty."

She looked at him strangely. "Yes, it is, sir. You will know all—from her."

They entered the house and went into the drawing-room. Then, looking at him hesitatingly for a moment, she said:

"One word, sir, before you see her. You will be surprised at what you will be told, but don't in turn frighten her by what you may know is taking place in Melton. I will go now and send Miss Dolores to you!"

"For goodness sake, send no one else to me!" he said impatiently. "I want to see no 'Miss Dolores,' only my Ivy!"

The door closed, and after what seemed an interminable time, it reopened softly, to admit a slim figure in some clinging black material, that intensified the red gold of her hair, and the white-rose pallor of her skin.

"Ivy, my darling!" he said hoarsely, reaching out his hands to the girl, who for one instant stood swaying in the doorway like a flower under the breeze. Then with a glad choking cry of mingled joy and pain, she was in his arms, weeping the tears that only joy can bring forth—tears that have their source in the heart.

"This must be a dream," she murmured, after a while. "How did you, whom I imagined had gone out of my life for ever, come here, darling?"

He laughed tenderly, then kissed the wistful face raised to his.

"Our good fairy, nurse Beaumont brought me, sweetheart. I have been wandering through the streets of London looking for you ever since I knew everything that had happened. Oh, my little love!" he exclaimed passionately. "How you must have suffered all this time, but that is over now! You will only know happiness in future!"

"Yes," she said slowly, "I have suffered, but I have also found much happiness in a way that seems almost like a miracle; so wonderful it has been!"

Then quickly, and gliding over the cruel conduct of Lady Maitland that had been instrumental in fastening suspicion on her, and making her run away, she told him of all that had happened, stopping short at the most important stage of her story, to say suddenly, and with heartfelt earnestness:

"Jack, that poor murdered tramp was not my father! You never let them convince you of that, did you? At first I thought it true, and it nearly broke my heart!"

His arm tightened round her. "No, sweetheart mine! I could not believe such a lie! Why trouble about it?"

"Why?" and her voice rang proudly and firmly, as she cried, "because I have found my father, my own dear, good father, whose life was shadowed in his youth by a great wrong done him by the man who has so nearly wrecked *our* lives—Digby Scarlett! See, Jack!" she half sobbed, as the door opened and a tall, white-haired man, with an infinite weariness in his face, but a great peace in his eyes, came into the room. "This is my father, Vernon Vivyan, the author, and the noblest man on earth!"

The hands of the two men met in one silent grip, the eyes of both suddenly becoming misty.

"I must correct what my little new-found girl has said," Vernon Vivyan spoke at length. "I have another name; it is"—and a dark flush rose to his pale cheeks—"that of Vernon Grant, an ex-convict, and the man whose perjury sent me to fifteen years' penal servitude was our common enemy—Digby Scarlett! Had it not been for the good offices of Nurse Beaumont, my child and I might have passed out of each other's lives ignorant of the joy so near at hand."

He stopped and looked at the boy who was so loved by his little treasure, and he smiled—one of those very rare smiles that came to his lips but seldom.

"I have found her, my Dolores, not to lose her, but to lend her to you! I am glad you will make her happy. I have a mission to perform before I rest, after that—when I have faced my enemy, and done one other thing—I shall know that my duty is finished! But now you young people have a lot to say to each other. We shall meet again!"

When he had left the room, Ivy, in a few artless sentences, told Jack all that she knew

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

through Nurse Beaumont about her birth, adding shyly:

"It was the mark under the hair on my temple that helped her to trace me, darling—the mark that has been one of shame before, but now to me is worth more than a martyr's halo!" She stopped, then said after a pause:

"One strange delusion my darling father has, is that he sees in Lady Maitland's photograph the likeness of his dead wife, my mother! Nurse Beaumont has said nothing about her to me—or to him—but I cannot get the idea out of his head! I should not like to think that she was my mother! Besides, it is impossible that she should have married again."

Jack was silent. He was thinking deeply and swiftly. The girl's words had set a train of thought in motion in his mind, startling in its weird possibilities.

He took her in his arms and kissed eyes, hair, and mouth, then, with reverent fingers raised the loose curls on her brow and pressed his lips to the brand of the broad arrow.

Suddenly, above the throbbing of their young hearts, there sounded loud voices in the hall, the voices of men raised in fear and questioning.

Instinctively Ivy tightened her hand on her lover's arm, as the door was flung wide open, and Vernon Vivyan rushed into the room, followed quickly by the man who had almost discovered her identity on the night he had dined with the master of the "Retreat." It was Ernest Heath!

FORTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

Ernest Heath Intervenes.

With a great fear tugging at her heart Ivy stretched out her hands to the man who was her father.

"Tell me," she gasped, with whitening lips. "What has happened? What has happened? Why do you and Mr. Heath rush into the room like this?"

Standing between her lover on one side and her father on the other she turned to the man who faced them with panting breath and excited eyes.

"I have upset Mr. Vivyan rather badly, I fear," he began; "but I came here from Melton and have come to warn you, Miss Lodge, that your hiding is in danger of being discovered by the detective who is hunting for Ivy Strange; and I know I am right in believing you to be that lady."

Before she could reply, Vernon Vivyan flung his arm before her to protect her from physical harm, and cried passionately:

"I cannot let her go! I know what it is when once the law holds you in her grip. She crushes the life, the heart, the very soul out of you, leaving but a wreck of what you once were."

"I don't understand," Ernest Heath said, looking at Ivy with a puzzled frown. "I did not intend to pain you, and meant to render you a serivce if I could by warning you. I left Melton yesterday, and feared to come straight on here because I might have been watched. So I waited, and by driving in a four-wheeler from town I managed to get here without attracting any attention."

"Where did you say you had come from?" said Jack, speaking for the first time. "I am the son of Sir Trevor Maitland, so take an interest in anyone coming from my native county."

"The son of—of Lady Maitland?" queried Ernest Heath, in a curious tone, looking at the frank, manly face of the boy before him, whose air of proprietorship towards Ivy told its own story.

Jack shook his head. "No, she is my step-mother—far too young to be my own."

"And Miss Strange?" said Ernest Heath slowly. "Her parentage is, I hear, still under a cloud? Don't you think that as she professes to be innocent of this murder, she would do more good by facing the music? I know it is the most natural thing in the world," he went on, "to want to shield her from the publicity of an arrest, but surely it is the cruellest in the end, for it keeps her far more before the public eye while she is still being searched for."

Vernon Vivyan turned sharply to him—his face was grey and his eyes were haggard.

"Firstly, Heath, let me tell you what you did not know the last time you were here. I have only lately discovered that Miss Lodge was the runaway Ivy Strange, the foundling from Melton, and my long-lost daughter, whom I had never seen—Dolores Grant! Through the villainy of a man called Digby Scarlett I was sentenced to fifteen years' penal servitude for forgery. My wife"—and he paused suddenly—"was Margaret Heath."

Ernest Heath started violently. "Then—then——" he exclaimed, "she must have thought you dead. She must have, for I have seen—oh, my God! This is awful!" he murmured. Then he looked at Ivy—a long, searching glance, full of tenderness, thought, and pain.

"Child, leave us," he said; "your father and I have much to discuss. But before you go, I would like to touch your brow first; you are very like someone who was once dear to me."

He bent his head and pressed his lips to the girl's burnished hair, and Jack Maitland, watching, knew that there was a tragedy underlying that kiss on his unconscious sweetheart's head.

He drew her softly out of the room, and the two men were alone.

Ernest Heath looked at the silent figure of the man whose work had attracted him to the extent of wishing to know more about him—the man whose personality had seemed to spell despair and everlasting sorrow.

Then, as he looked, another face rose up before him—a woman's, beautiful and haughty, with a coldly-gracious manner, that had changed to a wildly-beseeching one, when they had stood alone for those brief moments before he had left Maitland Manor.

"It cannot be," he muttered, "and yet it is, I know, in spite of the hair, and severity of style—it is the woman!"

Just then Vernon Vivyan turned. "I want you, if you will, to stay here with—her, while I go and find my enemy and kill him. The end is coming. This time I will be the victor."

With a sudden grip, Ernest Heath caught his arm. "Are you mad, Grant? Do you want to break that child's heart, as it would—to lose you in that way! Killing your enemy would not publish your innocence of that forgery charge, and only serve to put a rope round your neck. Besides——"

He stopped abruptly. A strange, burning gleam had come into the haggard eyes of the man who had married his little cousin in the years that had gone.

"How is my innocence ever to be proved?" Vernon said, slowly, "except by forcing the black-hearted villain to disgorge his infamy?"

"I know a better way than bullet persuasion," replied the other, with emphasis; "and you will know what it is soon. Your duty now is to take care of—*her*, the girl we both claim, with young Maitland, the link with the past. Promise me you won't seek out Digby Scarlett?"

Vernon Grant hesitated, then answered: "I promise not to seek out Digby Scarlett."

And it was not till afterwards that Ernest Heath remembered the manner in which the promise had been kept.

With a hasty farewell to his host he left the room, and sought Jack and Ivy, who were in an adjoining one.

"I want you two young people to stay with Mr. Grant," he said, quickly. "Don't leave him alone. I am going away on important business."

Jack went up to him, and, drawing him aside, said in a low tone: "Sir, tell me—you won't visit the—the—Manor? My father is lying in a dying condition, and any scene——" He stopped, and glanced meaningly at Ivy—he could not think of her by any other name—and following his gaze, Ernest Heath answered gravely:

"I shall not visit the Manor. *He* knows nothing."

When they were alone, Jack said quickly:

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"Darling, I am going now. But I want you to meet me, with Nurse Beaumont, to-morrow at Kingston Parish Church. Then I shall have a special license ready, and we shall get married quickly, and return to your father. He would be pleased, and you, dear one, will be happy with me to protect you."

She flushed warmly. "But my name, Jack; it is so notorious now, that no clergyman would marry me while the police wanted me."

He drew her to him tenderly. "No, sweet, your name is now Dolores Grant; no one knows that. Then, as Mr. and Mrs. John Maitland, we will return together to face that charge, strong in each other's love. I will take no refusal, and I know that your dear heart has none to give me."

"But—but, my father," she murmured, protesting while she yielded; "he ought to be told, Jack. He may feel hurt at our want of confidence."

"Sweetheart," he said gravely. "It will be a joy to Mr. Grant to see you safely my wife, before the police can step in between us! You know how he longs for your happiness."

And his kisses stopped the questions that fluttered to her lips.

In the meantime Ernest Heath was waiting at St. Pancras for a train to start for the north. As he settled himself in the corner of a first-class compartment, he murmured:

"It is a bold move, but for his sake I'll play it for all it is worth. I don't think time has robbed me of my peculiar gift; it has been an amusement hitherto, but this time it will bring tardy justice to avenge a great wrong."

The following morning a quiet little wedding took place in Kingston Parish Church, between two hearts that beat as one; attended only by an elderly woman, whose eyes sparkled with almost as much joy as those of the bride and bridegroom. Then together they returned to the "Retreat," and as they entered the house so dear to them, Jack whispered to his girl-wife:

"Now to make him rejoice with us in our joy—to say that he has not lost his daughter, only gained a son."

They ran to the room where he always sat among his books, and with a happy laugh Ivy flung open the door:

"Father—darling, father!"

Then the laugh died on her lips, and she turned a blank look upon her new-made husband.

Vernon Grant had gone; but a photograph lay on the open desk, and as their eyes fell upon it, a wave of terror sent the blood from their faces, and they understood.

The face that looked up at them from the cardboard was that of Lady Maitland!

FORTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

The Man and the Boy.

Gilbert Chase examined his note-book carefully. He had erased and corrected the notes until they bore very little resemblance to those he had first made when the young son and heir of the dying Sir Trevor had enlisted his services on behalf of the girl he loved, the girl on whose account Gilbert Chase was now waiting for a telegram from his junior.

He had wired him to hunt up the address of the author Mr. Vivyan, and at first this had seemed more difficult than he had anticipated, for the publishers of Vernon Vivyan had refused to give up the address of their contributor, but had offered to forward any communication.

At first this had delayed them not a little, but Scotland Yard has a way of getting over difficulties, and Gilbert Chase had wired his instructions for the arrest to be made of the missing girl, Ivy Strange, who was, under a disguise, probably in the house of the author as secretary.

And it was the answer to that telegram for which he was now waiting so impatiently. It was to have been sent immediately after the arrest of the girl, and that ought to have been accomplished some two hours ago. He could not understand the delay; it chafed him, for he felt he ought to have gone

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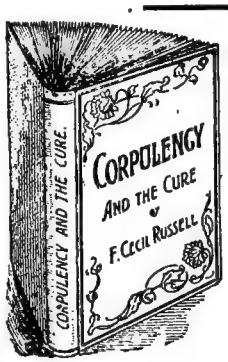

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

himself; but he had a strange disinclination to leave Melton until he had accomplished what he had in hand.

He had visited the scene of the murder of Mike Holland once more after hearing the fresh evidence Agnes Maitland had divulged in her jealous spite, and had argued that it was no positive proof to find the stump of a cigar, after all.

As he walked to and fro in his room at the "New Age," a knock at the door disturbed him. Going hurriedly to it, he opened it, and a youth stood outside with an orange-coloured envelope in his hand.

Gilbert Chase took it from him with a pleased smile, and shut the door. Now he was sure of the girl he wanted!—the girl whose evidence would put a noose round someone's neck, if not her own; and somehow he did not think it would be her own!

He opened it hurriedly; then a muffled anathema rose to his lips as he read the few words that dashed the cup of success from his grasp. They were:

"*Went Retreat as ordered, girl gone, also the master; no one in possession but a stupid old woman, who knows nothing; send instructions.*"

With a bitter sensation that Fate was on the side of the wrongdoers, he folded the flimsy bit of paper and placed it in his pocket, then went slowly down the stairs of the inn, out into the street. It was nearly dusk, and he was too preoccupied to notice a tall man coming towards him.

"Excuse me," said the stranger in a melodious voice, "am I on the right road to Maitland Manor?"

"Yes," he answered curtly; "keep straight on for about a mile and a half, and you will reach it, lying back near the wood."

The stranger passed on with a courteous acknowledgment, and as he disappeared Gilbert Chase wondered where he had heard a voice like that before! It haunted him, like the face of Lady Maitland had, until chance brought back the occasion to him of a brief meeting in the years that belonged to the past.

"It can't be a relation," he said, half-aloud, "going to see poor Sir Trevor on his deathbed; and it can't be that Mr. Heriot North who was nearly burnt to death the other night! He won't be about for some time at least! I wonder who it is? He's a stranger in these parts, that's clear."

And later on Gilbert Chase knew that the stranger was a man he would have given much to meet again, a man who would have proved a strong lever in the charge he was bringing round a proud, beautiful woman.

* * * * *

"Let me go, mummie. I want to do something that will help, something that will make you think me useful; now poor father is too ill to look after you, I want to take his place," and the wistful, childish face of Woolf Maitland gazed up into that of his mother.

She hesitated. It was agony to refuse him anything, and, on the other hand, she hated to have him out of her sight, the one pure love that had remained hers. As danger had threatened her more closely, her heart had centred its whole strength upon the son for whom she had willingly done so much and dared so bravely!

She smiled wearily, and said gently: "You have been to the 'Hollies' before, Woolf; there is no great service in inquiring for poor Mr. North; but if your heart is set upon it, then I will let you go; only come back soon, my darling, and be careful. I hate to let you go from me into those lonely roads at night!"

She bent her head and kissed with passionate tenderness the face of the child who was the essence of her life.

Boylike, he was restive under her caresses, and with a merry laugh ran lightly down the drive, the woman watching his lithe little figure until it disappeared. Then, with a soft expression in her eyes, she turned back into the Manor to watch the ebbing away of the life of her son's father.

The shadows grew darker along the country lane, and a slim, childish figure wrapt in its thoughts of self-importance did not hear the "toot-toot!" of a motor fiend, scorching along the road like an infuriated demon, with snorting engine and glaring red lights.

"Toot-toot!" and above the shriek of the motor a man's voice rang, sharp and imperative.

"Child! child! Out of the way! Quick!"

The boy turned, startled and wondering, but he did not move, fear seemed to have chained his feet to the ground. Then with a sudden dash, the man sprang forward into the middle of the road and flung his arms round the boy.

"Toot-toot!" came the motor, deafening them by its proximity; and then, before he could get the child out of the way, there was a thud and a shriek, a sickening sensation of life beneath the motor, and the next moment the great demon of the King's highway sped into the mist, leaving in its wake the two crushed shapes that lay across the lane, blurred and still, with an awful silence!

FORTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Tightening of the Coil.

"Remember, I want none of your fairy tales. If you try to bluff me with lies, it will be the worse for you!" and Gilbert Chase planted his back firmly against the side door of the Manor that led to the servants' entrance.

Mary Mason was his companion, and her black, beady eyes flashed vindictively upon the cool, imperturbable countenance of the detective.

"There's nothing I can tell you," she said sullenly. "I'm only one of the servants at the Manor, and know no more than the rest of them! And I can't stay long anyway, because Master Woolf has been brought in unconscious, with a strange gentleman who tried to save him from being run over by a motor-car. They are very bad, and I'm wanted to help."

"Oh, yes; you *can* stay, Polly," the detective retorted, noting the start that his use of the name had occasioned. "You won't be wanted for a few seconds; and it will be better for you to speak the truth briefly now, than to go into a police-court and have few details about your interesting career dragged out!

"How would you face your respectable fellow-servants at the Manor if they knew that you had only recently come out of prison, and belonged to a family of gaol-birds, of which the most notorious was your charming brother, the dead Mike Holland!"

The woman who had passed as "Mary Mason" for all those months drew back with a pale, frightened face and cowed eyes.

"How did you find out—that?" she gasped. "Who split on me?"

"I had the pleasure of meeting 'Mrs. Mike Holland,' your dainty little sister-in-law," he remarked blandly, "and she was very communicative—up to a certain point, but she gave me the address of her 'town residence' in Whitechapel!" He suddenly ceased his bantering tone, and said sharply: "Now, Polly Holland, you have thrown out a great many hints lately; I expect you to cease to *suggest* and do a little plain speaking, by way of a change."

The woman bit her lip. "What do you want me to tell you?" she said, after a brief pause.

"I expect you to tell me what this secret was between the dead convict and your mistress, Lady Maitland!" he said, in a business-like tone. "I believe you once served as the bearer of a message between them?"

"I know nothing about the secret," she replied quickly. "I only know as one night, when the family was at dinner, I was putting something away in 'er ladyship's dressing-room, when I 'card a noise like a moan and a scratching sound coming from the wardrobe. I went up to it but it was locked, and after a bit I got the key of another wardrobe and opened the door, when Mike tumbled out 'arf dead!

"I was took by surprise. But 'e told me that 'e had 'er ladyship in 'is power. 'E wouldn't tell me any more; 'e

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was always close, was Mike, but 'e said as 'ow there was a chance of makin' a mint of money! I took 'er a note from 'im once but she got round me so clever like that I can't say as she got it. She's one with a nerve!"

"What prison was your brother in?" said the detective thoughtfully.

"Dartmouth—'e 'ad a 'twelve year stretch' for robbery and coppin' a peeler on the nut!"

"Dartmouth!" murmured Gilbert Chase. "I see now—another man was working on the bogs at about the same time; that man was—was—phew! What a narrow little circle our lives run in!"

He looked at his informer. She was watching him from under her long lashes in a suspicious manner. But much as he distrusted her veracity, he knew he could rely upon it this time. Fear for her own skin had made her divulge another's secret.

"Remember," he said curtly; "you may be called upon to give evidence, so be careful what you say now. Did you ever find anything suspicious?"

She shook her head regretfully. "No; I listened and spied a lot on 'er, but only found a silver tassel off one of 'er dresses near the—the old oak in the spinny!"

"The old oak!" he said sharply. "What, since the—murder?"

"No, before—long before that, sir."

He caught her wrist suddenly. "Do you know, Mary, or Polly, who the murderer of your brother was?"

A grey pallor spread over the woman's sallow face.

"No," said she hoarsely, her eyes glittering with apprehension. "I don't! I don't!"

"I am going round to the front entrance presently," he said. "I shall ask to see her ladyship. I may require you again."

It was the morning after the disappointing telegram had reached him, saying that his prey had escaped again. He had gone on to the Manor and asked to see Lady Maitland, but had been met with the news that Sir Trevor was rapidly sinking, and that her ladyship could not leave his bedside.

For some unaccountable reason he had refrained from pressing his inquiry at such a time, and he had turned back, and cut across the wood into the village that way.

One of the witnesses in the case he was unravelling was on a sick-bed, too, nearly burnt to a cinder, but he would eventually buttonhole him; while there was the master of the "Rest," whose movements were certainly worth watching.

As he passed the front windows of the Manor he looked up at them, and then he saw that every blind was drawn.

He stood for a moment, awed by the knowledge that Death had taken the squire of Melton, and for a few seconds he remained silent, hat in hand, an expression of regretful deference on his face.

"Poor old Squire!" he murmured. "I'm almost certain he heard something that opened his eyes, and the shock was too much for him at his age. Out of respect for his memory I will leave her to at least regret some of her doings! She has only begun to realise that a rope dangles perilously near her lovely neck! And Mr. Jack is now the master!"

He moved away slowly. As he was crossing the road to enter the "New Age," a voice hailed him.

It was Digby Scarlett, and he greeted the detective with derisive hilarity.

(To be concluded shortly.)

Jones: "You say she is proud?" Bones: "Proud, why that woman wouldn't read a serial story because she'd have to buy it on the instalment plan."

Little Dot: "I don't see how cows can eat grass." Little Dick: "I s'pose when they is young, the mother cow keeps saying to her children: 'If you don't eat grass you shan't have any cake.'"

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is known throughout the world as positively the best and quickest remedy for Bad Legs, Old Wounds and Sores, and Skin Eruptions of every kind, and should be used in conjunction with the Pills. It is also the speediest remedy for Rheumatism, Lumbago, Pains and Stiffness in the Limbs and Joints, Backache, &c. For pains and Soreness at the Chest, and for Throat and Lung Complaints arising from Cold or Weakness, Holloway's Ointment affords most welcome relief in a very short time.

A COMPLETE DISPENSARY IN THEMSELVES.

Good Name for It.

She: "Why do they call a battleship 'she'?" He: "Because there are so many arms about her."

Peaceful Separation.

The Maid: "I trust that theirs was a peaceful separation?" The Man: "Very! He put the Pacific between them."

Didn't Want a Piano Solo.

Geraldine: "Life will be one grand sweet song after we are married." Gerald: "I don't care as long as it isn't a piano solo."

A Hard Face.

"Jack wanted my photo to put over his heart to keep the bullets from penetrating." "He must think you have a pretty hard face if it can stop bullets."

Accounted for by Ignorance.

Mr. Spelter: "Oh, you may talk as you please, Jane; but you were an ignorant woman when you married me." Mrs. Spelter: "Yes; that probably accounts for it."

No Cause for Excitement.

"Isabel, your new hat is absurd; it looks just like a huge flower-bed." "Well, you needn't get so excited, Edgar; you don't have to get up before daylight and pull weeds out of it."

A Physical Impossibility.

"Horace," she said chidingly, "why don't you tell me you love me?" Seizing a scrap of paper, the young man wrote on it: "How can I, darling, unless you remove your arm from round my neck?"

Still in the Family.

Jack: "My grandfather had a fine collection of silver which he bequeathed to my father on the condition that it should always remain in the family." Ethel: "Then you have it still?" Jack: "Well—er my uncle has it."

Where She Scored.

Mr. Whingleby: "Oh, you needn't feel so uppish. You're not the only girl in Peckham." Miss Flashleigh: "No, I'm not the only girl in Peckham who has publicly announced that she wouldn't have you if you were the last man on earth."

Unable to Agree.

"No, we couldn't agree," sighed the man. "I said I wasn't worthy of her, and she said I was. For the sake of harmony I yielded my opinion and said I was worthy of her, and she, not to be outdone in generosity, I suppose, yielded her opinion and said I wasn't."

Subtle Flatterer!

"Henry," she said disconsolately, "you didn't give me a birthday gift." "By Jove, that's so," said Henry, "but, you see, you always look so young that I can't realise you ever had birthdays." Then she was happy, and he smiled the mean, subtle smile of a man who has saved money.

He Claimed a Privilege.

"No, George," said the sweet girl, "I can only be a sister to you." "Well, then," he savagely replied, as he heard a subdued chuckle, "as your brother, I shall claim the privilege of lying under the sofa while you make fools of the other fellows."

Unkind Reflections.

"How long have you been married, Mrs. Ashleigh?" "Eleven years. You wouldn't believe it, would you?" "Not after seeing your husband." "He is young. The fac' is that we ran away from school together and were wedded." "Oh! Then he must have been one of those boys we read about who are always falling in love with their teachers."

Willie Knew Something.

"Willie!" she cried from the window, "you two boys get out of that hammock. You know you will break it down!" "Two little fellows like me and Tommy break it down?" inquired the boy. "Yes, you will." "An' last night, when that Mr. Smithkins called on you, an' you got tired sitting on the couch, and——" "Never mind, Willie," she interrupted hastily. "Perhaps it's all right, after all."

Only First-Class Travelling Wanted.

"Nellie," spoke the youth, with an air of confidence, "only say the word and you and I will sail together on the rough sea of life, bravely buffeting its waves, trimming our sails to meet the adverse winds that——" "Go, Geoffrey, go," interrupted the maiden. "The man who takes me on that journey must offer me a first-class passage on a steamer." Whereupon Geoffrey sailed out of her presence with a decided list to port.

Experience Teaches Wisdom.

He had just reached the peroration of his tribute to the modern athletic girl when the little fellow in the corner interrupted him. "Pardon me," said the little fellow, "but may I ask if you married one of these modern girls?" "Why, no, I——" "I thought not," interrupted the little fellow, as he resumed his seat, and those sitting near him were quick to note that he carried one arm in a sling and had a large bump on the top of his head.

The Elopement Was Cancelled.

He had adjusted the rope ladder and stood waiting in breathless silence. Suddenly her face appeared at the window. "Darling," she murmured, "you will have to go without me." "What!" he cried hoarsely. "Do you falter at the last moment? Speak, Miriam. What is it that keeps you back?" The young girl buried her face in her hands. "I am sorry, John," she moaned. "But father has just left a note in my room saying that I may have that new hat, after all." John knew it was all over then, and took away his rope ladder to look for another mash.

She Was Pleased.

The young man had only recently taken up photography and was an ardent enthusiast. He persuaded the girl to whom he was engaged to pose for him. She was seated in a hammock, and he stood directly before her when he took the picture. In a day or two he proudly exhibited the result of the sitting. She gave one glance at it and then handed it back. "Don't you like it?" he inquired. "I don't presume to criticise," was the reply. "I thought it was pretty good for a first attempt," he insisted. "Perhaps it is. I am glad you are satisfied with it." "Of course it might be better." "Do you think it looks like me?" "Yes." "Then, Herbert, I am content." "But you don't seem very cheerful over it." "Perhaps I don't show it; but that photograph has made me very happy." "I'll have a frame made for it and give it you." "No, I don't want to keep it. But it fills me with joy, nevertheless. They say that when beauty fades, affection vanishes; but when I realise that you can see me depicted with hands and feet like those, without breaking our engagement, I am convinced that there can't be any doubt about your loving me when I am old."

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Plain Women Become Beautiful.

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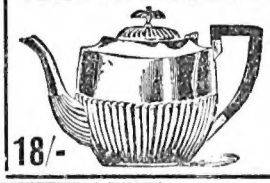

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Taking the Visitors Compliments.

"A GENTLEMAN friend has been staying a day or so with us," writes "QUEENIE." "We did not very much care for him, but on his departure he said he had made a most enjoyable stay. How should I answer this compliment?"

* * * * *

I am afraid there is only one stock answer in such a case, and that is "I hope we shall see you again, Mr. Blank." However you may have disliked the gentleman, you should try and give the impression that his visit has been pleasant to you, though there is no need for you to ask him again.

❦❦❦

The Absent Kiss.

"DOES my young man think anything of me?" asks "E. N." "I have kept company with him for three months and he has never yet offered me a kiss. Should I wait a little longer, or shall I break off the engagement?"

* * * * *

I suppose the absence of the kiss is not the only sign of his feelings towards you. Perhaps he is too modest to embrace you, but wants to know you a little better. You must judge by his general actions, the way in which he speaks to you, whether he seems glad to meet you and sorry to part, and a host of other things. But, I must say, when there is any real love on a young man's part, he does not usually lose many opportunities for signifying it in the usual way—that is, by a kiss.

❦❦❦

An Indiscretion.

"SEASIDE LASSIE" suffers from a lack of friends, especially of the opposite sex. The other day, a young student at a local college spoke to her, and having taken a great fancy to his appearance, she answered him, and allowed him to walk with her. Since then, they have met in the evenings, without her parents' knowledge. They would be very angry if the affair leaked out, as they occupy a very good social position, and could not afford to be talked about in the town. Should "SEASIDE LASSIE" drop the young man, and if so how?

* * * * *

I sympathise with "SEASIDE LASSIE," as no doubt the temptations to receive attentions from a nice young man are very great. I think, however, she had better postpone the affair until she and he can meet on a more satisfactory footing. It is not quite right for a girl in a good social position to have secret meetings with strangers which might be noticed by other people. The young man should find some means to get properly introduced to her, and until he is able to do so "SEASIDE LASSIE" should ask him to allow the affair to drop. And in future, "SEASIDE LASSIE," do not speak to strange young men, no matter how attractive. That is not what a well brought up girl should do.

Absent Parents.

"MY parents are going away for a holiday," writes "MISS W. E." "I shall be alone in the house with my two brothers. Would it be wrong of me to ask a young man occasionally to tea or supper?"

* * * * *

If your brothers are at home, certainly you could do so. After all, you are hostess in the absence of your parents, and could ask whom you liked. Most girls, I am afraid, would not have any doubt about doing so.

❦❦❦

The Art of Recognition.

"SHOULD a lady always make the first bow to a gentleman friend in the street?" asks "HETTIE." "If so, how should she act if she met him several times afterwards on the same walk?"

* * * * *

It is the lady's privilege to make the first acknowledgment of a man. The second time of meeting, it is usual to just smile recognition; but if more meetings result, one is quite justified in turning the head in an opposite direction. The situation is usually saved, in such cases, by the parties speaking to each other.

❦❦❦

Confiding In Brothers.

"SHOULD a girl tell her brother her love affairs?" asks "ALICE." "I have lately been receiving attentions from a young man, unknown to my brother, though my mother knew all about it. When he found out, he was most angry, saying that I ought not to 'carry on' with fellows he did not know."

* * * * *

If your mother approves of your conduct, I suppose that is licence enough. If your brother, however, is a good friend of yours, you would not be doing any harm by confiding your love affairs to him. It might be a wise safeguard, as a man would be very careful not to get entangled with you if he knew you were being sternly watched over by a male relation. Further, a brother might help you in many ways in testing the suitor's position and suitability for your hand. Cold, calculating men often observe things about others which escape the eyes of young ladies in love

❦❦❦

A Vanishing Vision.

"DISCONSOLATE LOVER" is in a fix. He met a girl several years ago, and only saw her once. He did not trouble to inquire her address, or even her surname. Since that, he has been recalling her sweet face and quiet manner, and has experienced a longing to see her again. In fact, he has discovered that she is the one girl in the world he could ever love. The trouble is that, now that he wishes to resume her acquaintance, he does not know how to trace her. Beyond her Christian name and her district, he knows nothing of her whereabouts. She is a factory operative.

* * * * *

As you say, to advertise in a newspaper might not be the best means of reaching her, as factory girls would not be likely to read the papers. However, one cannot be sure on that point, so you might at any rate try once in one of the dailies. If it did not reach the girl herself, possibly one of her friends might see it. Supposing that to fail, I suggest that you haunt the neighbourhood in which she works at the times for closing the factories, and carefully watch for the girl. It might be a wearisome task tracing her, but what is that when the prize is the "one girl in the world"?

Cynthia

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